Contained

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Contained

by lookupkate

Summary

Will Graham is self-sufficient and self-contained. Not a leak in the ship. After a rough summer chasing serial killers for the FBI, Will goes back to his teaching position at Quantico. His circle is getting smaller, and he's fine with that, really. That is, until a mystery man shows up to ostensibly take his spot on the forensics team. This man is arrogant, rich, and handsome, leading to an immediate butting of heads. Would be a shame if Will was never the same again.

Three part story 🙌🙌

(Reminder to self: just because Hannibal shows his tits in chapter four doesn't mean this won't be slow burn.)
*addendum: we held off till chapter 21! Edging champions of the 🌎🌍🌏 🥇 🥇 🥇 I'm so proud of us, guys 🤣🤣🤣

Notes

If you don't know, we're having discussions in the comments about morality, cruelty and desire. 😍 Drop in and grease the wheels. 💦 Each kudo is like a little pat to my head, and each comment keeps our in-story world expanding. 🙌

Part 1&2 of this story are finished, 3 is happening right now!

In The Beginning

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes

Leaves fell in spirals in the chilly morning fog, bright yellow due to the mass planting of Paper Birch when the parking lot, to what the locals dubbed simply Quantico, was first built. Leaves fell in waves, moving with the direction of the breeze. The dance they did was a background to chaos, the only thing orderly there that morning. It was the first week of classes in the brutalist grey buildings to the left of the lot and the cars coming and going were navigating each other clumsily, moving like a mass of drunken termites.

It was easy then, for a slick black Bentley to not take much notice. It pulled into one of the teacher slots and stopped. That was where the under-the-radar bit ended, as the man that got out of the Bentley couldn't help but catch the eye. Even the leaves parted to let him pass. His surroundings shifted in a sudden breeze, or just maybe, by force of will and dancer's toe.

The man wore a suit that looked near aubergine from a few yards, but clarified into a red on black refined check as he drew closer. It was expertly crafted to balance his muscled shoulders, to soften the animal strength beneath its thread. It was garish against the chinos and polo shirts worn by the many students, but the undercut and wide brow were what gave him away as not *from* around here. The combination gave the impression of overseas trips and *old* old money.

He moved with purpose to the entrance midway down the first building and managed to open the door just as a bell rang out to note the changing of classes. Doors on either side of him opened and students burst into the halls, boisterous as mating salmon in their push towards the exit.

Still, as if he had both arms outstretched to brush against them, the sea of students parted to give him a wide berth and kept him in their field of vision even as they poured out into the lifting mist. He let the attention wash over him, breathing in power with every hushed voice, every pair of eyes widening in awe.

The thing that managed to get his attention, to stop him in *his* tracks, was a familiar voice. The voice of a man talked about often in his circles. A voice he'd memorized from stuttering YouTube videos of scientific conferences and defenses of papers. None of them had captured the voice's full resonance. A siren song to those smart enough to listen.

"My office hours are posted, otherwise email me. Don't call the number listed, it'll just ring the front desk. I don't take phone calls," Will Graham said from the front of the classroom, raising his voice at the end to make sure the mass of students heard.

The shuffling of papers and bags, and what sounded like a full cattle drive in the hall, *still* overtook his final words. He liked it that way, if he was honest; most of his students as eager to leave as he was.

They filed out, flowing into the wide hallways as Will fiddled with the remote to the projector and took a few grounding breaths. The Type A students and the ones looking for a mentor pulsed around him. They held their notepads and tried to catch his eye, in the end finding only each other as he held tight to the bubble of silence that he was holding to.

Will knew he was the big conversation for the first few weeks. He also knew they'd soon give up on talking to him after class and just make a study group. They always started out enamored by his looks and the impression he made up there, elevated and surrounded by the stark lines of the room, but that would wane. He wasn't there to talk to them, he was there to teach them.

They would realize wasn't daydream material. Hell, he wasn't even *boyfriend* material. It had been a good decade since he'd last tried that hat on. No, he was set apart from the rest of them, even his colleagues.

His mind stuttered to a painful halt at that, spitting gravel.

For a short time, during the washing heat of Summer, he'd believed there might be something there between himself and Doctor Alana Bloom. The attraction was there, he could feel the tension, but Alana was careful to set him straight in her own way. She might have been attracted to him, but she was much more hesitant than his students to climb into the hot darkness of his mind, let alone the bleak prospect of his bed.

It wasn't the dog hair, either, he knew. It was the whiskey bottle by the chair and the nightmares that shone out of his eyes like beacons on the worst days. She looked at him and saw calamity; he didn't blame her.

He took off his glasses and rubbed the bridge of his nose, settling his thumb and forefinger to the crease of his closed lids and pushing hard enough to see black specs swim behind them. The semi-quiet of the classroom swaddled him as he finished getting his things together and making sure all the caps were on the dry-erase markers. He needed coffee and he needed sleep, but only one of those was in his future.

The sound of a set of keys shifting in someone's pocket was the only thing that alerted him to the presence in the doorway. Not Alana then, with her expressive heels, and not Jack with his wall-shaking pronouncements. He figured anyone else could wait, and let his eyes bore into the white expanse of the pull down screen at the back of the room.

Go away. Go away, he chanted internally.

"Good morning," a voice intoned.

"Not the person you're looking for," Will replied, tucking his glasses in his breast pocket and turning with what he hoped was a scathing enough look on his face.

All it brought out of the other man was a sly smile. Will looked him over and decided sly was probably the only type of smile that came easily to him. His broad shoulders and distinctive face would have been enough to bowl someone over, but the checked suit and absurdly

shined shoes let Will know this man was from another *version* of real life. A version Will would never be privy to on a teacher's salary, even at the FBI.

His stomach roiled with the same old bit of anger he always felt around the rich. If it showed on his face, it only made the man smile wider.

"Doctor, Doctor Lecter!" Jack Crawford bellowed and then crooned, rounding the corner and eyeing Will with the usual hunger. "I see you've met our Professor Graham. I hope I didn't leave you waiting long."

Our. Will always quietly despised the man.

"On the contrary," Lecter replied, refusing to even turn to acknowledge Jack, "we were only just getting acquainted."

"More of a misunderstanding," Will replied coolly, meeting Doctor Lecter's eyes fleetingly as he pulled the strap of his bag over his shoulder and squared up.

Jack seemed forgotten in the doorway as the apparent doctor, Will thought psychiatrist, slipped a money clip from his pocket and began pulling something out.

For a wild moment Will was sure it was going to be a crisp bank note, something being bought and paid for. His cheeks grew hot and he held his breath.

"To hasten our acquaintance. In your own time, Professor Graham."

It set his teeth on edge, but all that followed was a cream business card placed on the table between them. Will picked it up and slid it into the outer pocket of his jacket without a single look.

"Will," he corrected, hating the way the formality sounded on the man's tongue, like an inside joke.

"Hannibal," the man replied, leaning in uncomfortably close to try to catch Will's eye again.

"Yes, well, we have the next room open for you, Doctor Lecter," Jack pressed, unwilling to let things dawdle even as something was passing between the two men in front of him. "For the next half hour, at most."

Will watched out of the corner of his eye as Hannibal spun slowly on his heel and allowed himself to be shuttled along. Jack gave him a questioning look, but he offered nothing in return.

Coffee. Coffee was all that mattered.

"Why isn't Professor Graham joining us?" Hannibal asked, once he and Jack were settled at the long conference table, pictures strewn out between them.

Jack had no idea what had transpired between the two men before he interrupted, but this wasn't the first time he'd spoken with Hannibal and the man never seemed interested in anything but the crimes he was asked to consult on. Perhaps the same thing hooked Hannibal as hooked him when he met Graham.

"He's made it quite clear he wants nothing to do with seeing this," Jack replied, hand waving across the table, "in person."

"He sees too much," Hannibal replied, as if in agreement.

Yes, hooked. If there was something there, something between them, Jack thought, it could very well be used to his advantage.

"How long did you manage to pick Will's brain before I arrived?"

Hannibal chuckled at the light of curiosity in the other man's eyes. "Not long at all, I assure you. Alana has mentioned him once or twice."

(That wasn't even close to true, but Jack didn't need to know that. In truth, Alana had come to him months ago with her own Will Graham dilemma. He'd been swayed that night by her description of the man and had done his own research.)

"Well, you can blame Doctor Bloom for Will not being here now. She stopped me from recruiting him when this whole thing started," Jack replied, pulling the string just so. "She thinks he's unstable."

"Yet he's stable enough to teach in these esteemed halls," Hannibal countered, his face unnervingly jovial.

"Yes," Jack allowed. "Teaching provides a certain amount of...distance. He only sees the crimes through photos and crime scene reports. He's not interested in returning to the field."

"Returning?" Hannibal asked, feigning confusion.

"He was a cop in Baltimore. Got stabbed in the shoulder, couldn't pull the trigger," Jack supplied, watching the brief turning of wheels behind Hannibal's eyes.

Hannibal swallowed hard and uncrossed his legs, "Which shoulder?"

Chapter End Notes

Hannibal: ah, the lyrical quality of his speech, the full experience of his voice, chef's kiss, chef will kiss, listen to this beautiful man speak!

Will: NO ONE is allowed to talk to me outside work hours, I repeat, I do not answer my phone UNLESS I'M GETTING PAID ❌📞❌🤫

Everybody wants a piece of my bouncing baby boy 😅 he's got that penis delirious quality all the guys are talking about 👄 too bad he bites 🦷🥩🤦‍♂️🚫😒

The Card

Chapter Summary

The business card seems to haunt Will from his pocket, with a brief reprieve from Beverly.

Chapter Notes

Theme song of the chapter:
Sinking Ship
by Wild Child

Will pushed through the throng of students, head down and eyes focused on the tile floor. He bumped a few shoulders, but managed to make his way into the teacher's lounge without getting pulled from his thoughts.

For how big their budget was, the lounge was depressingly stark. They had been going for a clean, Scandinavian look, but the large space in the middle was wasted and the seating at the counter made it feel more like a fast food place. Besides, he'd always found the red accents against the bare concrete of the walls obnoxious.

The business card seemed to emanate heat from his jacket pocket as he poured himself a paper cup of burnt coffee and went to sit by the far window. The glass was tinted, which afforded him the chance to watch the new students swarm between classes without having to be seen in return. He rested his forehead against the glass and felt the cold bite into his skin. It was a happy relief as he felt flushed, if not with fever then at least with anger.

Who the hell was Hannibal Lecter, and how on earth had he slithered onto the payroll of the FBI? Will knew he was taking the position Jack had first offered him, and for some reason it felt like theft. This pompous Duke of *who knew where* was trying to play Will Graham, and it didn't feel right.

"Bad first day already?" came a bright voice from over his shoulder.

Will smiled to himself; caught out by one of the only people who could talk to him straight and not end up on his shit list.

Beverly Katz wasn't actually meant to be in the teacher's lounge, as she worked in the next building down in forensics, but she blended in flawlessly with the other teachers, so there

was that. Wearing her usual smart slacks, button down shirt, and demure heels, she was perfectly professional.

“Stopping by for our famous coffee?” Will asked, moving his bag from the seat next to him and looking up briefly in greeting.

“Yeah, heard it’s shit, and I have a thing for disappointment,” Beverly quipped, sitting down with her own steaming cup. “What has *you* looking so damn forlorn?”

Will chuckled and looked at the bridge of her nose, close enough to eye contact to count on such short notice.

“You know me,” he replied darkly, “always making new friends.”

“I’m interested, go on,” Beverly said, nudging the toe of his shoe with hers and leaning in conspiratorially.

She really was Will’s closest friend, even if they hadn’t known each other long. She had a way of not letting him bottle things up, pushing him to disclose whatever was currently on his mind. She was honest with him in a way most everyone else, save Jack Crawford, was afraid to be. She didn’t buy into the front Will put on. He could see, briefly, what it might have been like to have a sister.

“I was...interrupted after class,” he explained.

“Rude.”

“He wasn’t even there for me,” Will continued, his nose curling and lips twitching at the memory.

“He?” Bev redirected.

“Oh, you’ll have plenty of time to meet him,” Will answered ruefully. “Pretty sure he’s your new profiler.”

Beverly understood immediately, if she decided not to say anything on it. She’d met Will a few months prior when he consulted on the Driller case. His insight was impressive and she was sure he would settle into the team in time, no matter how weird he was, but it made Will twitchy and cruel to get so close. Made him reek of fear, and sweat through his ill-fitting shirts. Within days he rescinded the position and went back to putting together his lesson plans ahead of the next semester.

She thought it was the only time she’d really seen him make a good choice about his mental health, and she was proud of him for it, but she knew he’d still miss the rush of solving an open case. It made sense that he’d be upset at someone taking that spot, even if he didn’t want it.

“Oh my god,” she whispered, eyes going playfully wide, “he’s the one Alana brought in! Do you think they fucked?”

Will snorted at the vulgarity. Bev knew how to release the tension, and he was grateful for it.

“I don’t think that man has done anything that could be categorized as such. He was so,” he tried, faltering at the end.

Beverly leaned in and drank her coffee, watching Will’s lips turn as he looked for the right word.

“Sterile,” Will landed on, looking around to make sure they had plenty of room for gossip. “I bet he wears sock garters. No one that wears sock garters *fucks*.”

“Oh no, he’s a grandpa,” Beverly tittered.

“He’s not old,” Will corrected, “just aggravatingly formal. He gave me his *business card*.”

This perked Beverly up. “Lemme see!”

“I tossed it,” Will lied.

He wasn’t sure why he lied, but the card burned hotter in his pocket when he did.

A group of teachers burst through the door at that moment, allowing the lie to go mostly unnoticed, he thought. He didn’t like lying to Beverly, but something nagged at the back of his mind, something that said the card was his to keep. He decided he’d burn it in the fireplace the second he got home to be rid of the whole ordeal.

Beverly watched the group move in behind them and settle at one of the long benches near the kitchenette. Her phone pinged in her pocket and she stood as she read what was on the screen.

“Better go before Jack comes looking for me. Seems like I get to meet your crush sooner than later,” she teased, downing the end of her coffee and ignoring the disgust on Will’s face.

“Just don’t-“ Will tried, glancing around feverishly.

“Fall in love with him?” Beverly interrupted with a grin. “First rule of Fight Club.”

Will let out a small laugh and watched as Beverly left. “Pretty sure that’s not how it goes,” he replied, mostly to himself.

He thought back on what Beverly had said about Alana bringing Lecter in, racking his mind in search of anything Alana might have mentioned about the man. He grimaced when he recalled suddenly that Lecter had been her *mentor*.

A spark of fresh humiliation rushed through him and he felt his gut react to the bloom of adrenaline. Maybe that was what Alana was really looking for, a *man* in comparison to his stunted personality and solitary life. Yes, he decided, Lecter looked like the type to hold dinner parties with Baltimore’s elite. He felt overshadowed and small and bitter, but that was nothing new.

Will's father would have said he had something stuck in his craw. The man's ghost was often right over Will's shoulder, or at least in his ear; like a second inner voice, perhaps. It never took him over like it did then.

As he pulled off the main street and onto his private road that night, he was jolted with an overwhelming sense-memory of riding in the passenger side of his dad's old pickup. He could smell his father's aftershave, and looked at everything the headlights picked up with young eyes. The uneven track bumped his lightweight sedan back and forth and the headlights hit left, then right and back again, picking up the reflectors on each side of the road like a strobe light.

Yellow, white, yellow. He felt time retrace itself.

Winter.

Working part-time at the Christmas tree lot with his dad, gloves always tacky with sap and smelling intensely of pine. Coming home each night after dark, dad's window down to pull out his cigarette smoke. The biting cold that snuck into the cab nonetheless, his feet the only parts of his body that weren't freezing, hanging right in front of the blasting heater. The smell of melting, or maybe aging, plastic.

He must have stayed in his memories for a good ten minutes, surprised as he was that *he* was the one meant to hit the brakes when his house came into view and not his ghost of a father. His breathing was erratic and he worked to steady it as he bared down on the brake. He lifted his hands barely off the wheel and watched as they shook.

Out of the cocoon of the past he felt unmoored, alone again. He left his coat and bag in the car, keys in the ignition, and stumbled up the rest of the driveway. It was a struggle to get his footing. He saw his house ahead as a ship adrift in the black waters of night, windows lit and the front porch calling to him like a savior. He could take refuge there.

And damn, it was cold! His ears were numb with it and his fingers started to tingle. Gloves in the car, and unwilling to turn back, Will shoved his hands into his jacket pockets as he hopped up the steps.

The handle was right there, and he could hear his pack of mutts scratching and whining at the front door. Their heads popped up in the windows in the edges of Will's vision, but he didn't move. His left hand felt at the sharp edges of the business card and he sensed himself *sinking*.

This man would replace him. He would be charming, affluent, stable. He would be everything Will wasn't. Oh God, he already felt himself disappearing. Alana, Beverly, the siren call of the forensics department, everything would be stripped from him. He'd be smoke, dissipating in the presence of another unmet set of opportunities. Smoke.

Buster finally pulled him from the sudden spiral of despair with a quick bark through the door, and Will swallowed and opened the screen door enough to rest it on his hip to feel for his keys.

Glutton for punishment, apparently, it dawned on him that they were in the *fucking* car. A set of bells and horns went off in his head, calling back to flickering tv screens and barking announcers. *'Another win for Will Graham, and what's his prize?*' He huffed out a quick breath and started back to the car, cursing the whole time.

Supper

Chapter Summary

Hannibal bakes a quiche with homemade pork sausage and fresh rosemary, Will eats canned stew over his sink.

Chapter Notes

3 bookmarks
3 comments
333 views
Something is happening people! Not sure what, but it's happening!!

Oh, did I mention that Hannibal is a cannibal?

See the end of the chapter for more notes

Schubert came through the built-in speakers above the cabinets in the kitchen as Hannibal pulled a steaming quiche from the oven and placed it to cool on the counter. Oven mitts tossed aside, he focused back on the small screen on the back of his camera. He pressed the zoom button and settled in on Will Graham's face, partially obscured by leaves. He flicked to the next photo and made a mental note of Will's license plate.

The doorbell rang and he breathed in deeply before setting the camera aside and tossing a hand towel over his shoulder to look more the part. He knew exactly how inviting the image would be. He opened the front door with his best warm smile.

"Alana, come in," he said, taking the wine bottle offered and ushering her out of the cold night and into the warmth of the foyer.

"Hope that's alright," Alana gushed, removing her hat to let dark curls fall over her shoulders.

Hannibal carefully scented the air and took a moment to run his eyes over her reddened cheeks before thanking her for her offering and leaning past her to lock the front door.

Alana glimpsed a roaring fire as they walked past the living room and into the kitchen. She adored Hannibal's kitchen. She ran her hand along the countertop and took in the scents of roasting garlic and olive oil as she walked to a seat near the fridge where a wall of drying herbs hung.

It was too warm for the jacket she was wearing, and she let Hannibal slip it from her shoulders to hang over the back of the chair. It was always so tidy in Hannibal's kitchen, even when he'd just obviously been cooking. Everything in abundance, but in its place. She wondered off hand what kind of schedule Hannibal's cleaners had to keep.

"For you," Hannibal addressed warmly, holding up an unlabeled bottle of beer before pouring it generously into a chilled glass. "I brewed this myself."

Alana took the glass and sipped at it as Hannibal went about cutting her a steaming slice of quiche.

"I hope the bit of pork in this isn't too rich for you," he offered. "I just recently made the sausage, and I have more left over than I bargained for. I find I have to sneak it in here and there."

On the surface he looked indulgently smug, but underneath a memory stuttered to life in his mind like an old reel to reel.

(a man jogging past him

his own breath in his ears

the prick of a needle

a body zipped into an elegant travel wardrobe

the grunt he'd let out hefting it over his shoulder

an industrial saw coming to life

the taste of copper on his lips)

The memory only took up a split second of real-time, and he was back just as Alana said something about the dinner. He didn't catch it, so he just smiled and continued plating.

To Alana, Hannibal didn't skip a beat. She was too engrossed in the sounds of the kitchen and the feeling of warmth that filled her when Hannibal preened about the sausage. It always felt like he was able to put a spell on her. She had put off dinner when he texted her mid-day with an offer of a late meal and a recounting of his campus visit. Hannibal's cooking was always worth the wait, and so, apparently, was the beer.

"This is delicious," she said, holding the glass aloft to stare at the amber hue through the condensation. "I don't know how you find the time."

"Come, it would be a waste to not enjoy the fire," Hannibal said in response, wiping his hands on a clean cotton towel and bracing himself briefly against the counter.

His usual crisp white shirt sleeves were rolled up to the elbow, and his skin stretched taught as his muscled forearms moved. Alana admired them for a beat too long to be considered discreet. Maybe it was the beer, or maybe the heat of the kitchen, but she let herself slip.

Luckily, Hannibal just grinned like a pleased house cat and held the two plates aloft with an ease that suggested he'd worked as a waiter in some far off past life.

Alana followed him into the living room and allowed herself to be seated on an overstuffed chair directly under one of the many mounted sets of antlers. She let her eyes adjust to the dim lighting and waited patiently as Hannibal arranged her plate and a second bottle of home brewed beer for her at a small side table.

When he finally sat in a matching chair across from the fireplace and took up his fork, Alana dug into the quiche. Unreal, unbelievably flavorful. Fluffy and perfectly balanced, the crust golden brown.

The crackle of the fire kept them from silence as they allowed time to spill out between them. The firelight did interesting things to Hannibal's face, passing this way and that across his cheekbones and allowing for a brief moment where his visage shifted to that of a skull. The light hung heavy on his brow, shrouding him in starts and fits.

"So," Alana finally pressed, letting her fork rest momentarily on the edge of her plate. "How was your first day at the FBI?"

Hannibal took a moment to settle himself, head tilting to the side as he ran his tongue over his front teeth.

"The beginning of a new semester always comes with a bit of turmoil," he replied, giving little away.

"So does working with Jack Crawford," Alana said. "He didn't rub you up the wrong way, did he?"

Hannibal considered, "is that what he did to Will Graham?"

"Will?" Alana asked, confused by the turn the conversation was taking. "I think the case was what put him off, not Jack...though Jack probably didn't help. Did you meet Will?"

Hannibal hummed in affirmation and looked into his glass of wine as if thinking. Alana didn't really want to talk about Will. She still felt strange about their friendship, unsure if the brief moment they'd shared had upended the tentative understanding between them. Will was fragile and she didn't want to be the reason he finally broke, let alone the only thing to keep him held together.

"You don't trust Will in Jack's hands," Hannibal tried, pulling her from tense thought. "Are you worried Will might leave the FBI altogether?"

"I'm worried he'll meet the business end of his government issued firearm," she answered honestly.

"Perhaps he's not as delicate as you think," Hannibal said, eyes drifting to the fireplace. "Even the most frangible materials grow stronger when met with the right level of resistance."

There was something simmering there, but Alana didn't know what it was. It made a new heat fill her belly and she felt slightly sick.

"What *on earth* did Will say to you?" she asked, trying to decipher the look on Hannibal's face in the flickering light. What she found there made her more uneasy.

Hannibal laughed, a bid to ease the tension in the room, and backed off. "Forgive me, I'm not trying to obfuscate, truly. We only exchanged a few words. Nothing more than a simple hello."

Alana sighed and settled back in her chair, mollified for the moment. There was still something there, but she decided against picking at that particular scab. She cracked open the second beer and let herself get back to eating.

Hannibal watched her relief and reminded himself to go slow. He had all the time in the world to learn about Will Graham, and Alana wasn't his only opportunity to do so. No, he would spend the night gentling her, making sure he kept her close.

An hour away, Will emptied a can of beef stew into a microwave safe bowl and started it heating. The dog's dinner warmed up on the stove, and every last one of them looked on in anticipation. They were laying down quietly at Will's back as he stirred their turkey and rice mash. Will had forgotten to get a new loaf of bread, so he pulled out the two end pieces that were left in the bag from the week before. They were curled and a bit dry, but he moved the pot off the stove and lay them gently over the low flame to warm them.

He scooped dinner over the kibble for the dogs and laid out their bowls with a few distinct whistles to stop them from just bounding in as one.

"Settle in, settled in," he cooed, burning his fingers as he turned the bread slices.

The pack ate quietly, crunching away in unison. It was peaceful enough that he jumped when the microwave went off behind him. He grabbed the bowl out of it with a potholder and tossed the slightly burnt toast in and grabbed a spoon.

It was too cold out for him to want to sit on the front porch since he hadn't been inside long enough to need a break from the heat, so he just stood over the sink to eat. It was his first substantial meal in a few days, and that said something when it was two pieces of bread and a can of cheap stew. He had to get out of the habit of trying to live on coffee and the cold sandwiches from the vending machine in the cafeteria at work.

He'd lost his appetite after the Driller case. He still had nights where he'd live out the murders in his dreams, waking covered in sweat and mouth bitter with the memory of all that blood. That was enough of an excuse for the loss of weight over the last few months, but the truth was a much different creature.

Alana thought he was horrified by what he felt when he put himself in the mind of the killer, but the real horror was what he didn't feel. He'd agreed to work on Jack's team because he thought it would make him *feel* something. He'd thought that after five years of teaching and writing papers, being out in the field would bring something back to life inside of him, but that light seemed permanently extinguished.

The truth was, he was bored. Bored of the same pathetic men acting out their power fantasies on an unsuspecting public. Bored of the same sloppy executions. Bored of solving crimes that were so increasingly uninspired.

That boredom revealed something to Will about himself that he was still grappling with. He didn't just want to save the victim, he wanted to be entertained. He still didn't know where to fit that new bit of insight in his concept of self.

He finished the last few bites of toast and ran the hot water in the sink for the dog bowls, planning to soak them overnight. The dogs were still working on their dinner, so he went through to the living room and sat with a sigh on the side of his bed.

Barely still awake, and damning those nightmares, he went about taking off his shoes and socks, then his watch and jacket. He thought for a second about the card in the pocket and stood to toss the jacket over a chair. All the anger he'd felt had simmered down to a familiar self-reproach, and that was enough to not want to fuel the flames any further. The thought of burning the card felt pathetic now, and he was too tired to think about Hannibal Lecter anymore.

Winston came to his side, the medium sized dog just tall enough to tuck his nose into Will's hanging hand and push Will's hips so he swayed.

"Okay, Okay, I know," Will said, ruffling the fur behind the dog's ears and leaning in to rub down its sides. "Did you finish dinner, then? Show me, show me."

With that, the card was forgotten and Will was back in his familiar nightly routine.

Chapter End Notes

Pssst, hi DaringD 🥰😘🥰😘

Good To See You

Chapter Summary

Will and Hannibal meet again.

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes

One Week Later

Freddie's apartment was silent except for the sound of the click wheel on her mouse and the dance music bleeding out of her headphones. She always listened to a downloaded cache of early 2000s Russian house when she was working, imagining herself in a coffee bar somewhere no one knew her name.

She slowly scrolled through her latest lot of photos, pausing to get a better look at the new consultant. He was a beast of a man, she thought, though he spent a lot of money to hide it. His suits probably cost more than she made in a year as a freelance journalist, but that wasn't what interested her.

She ticked the corner of a few photos of the man speaking with Jack Crawford and, saving them in a separate file, made her way to the next set. She licked her lips and clicked on a particular photo to make it full screen.

"You're my cash cow," she murmured.

The photo was taken through a doorway, so the edges weren't clean, but the material almost lent itself to a pulp novel aesthetic. *Sneak a peek into the men's locker room,* it said *, no one is looking.*

"I'm looking, Dr. Lecter," Freddie purred. "I am very much looking."

Will pushed into the teacher's lounge and tossed his bag over a chair before walking to the coffee maker. As there had been every morning of the past week, there was a fresh tray of breakfast pastries. This morning it was scones, and they were still warm as Will tucked two into a paper towel and poured himself a cup of black coffee. He hated that hazelnut shit.

He glanced at the door before settling into his seat, but Beverly wasn't anywhere to be seen, so he checked his phone and fidgeted slightly before putting it back in his pocket. His pinky

finger brushed the edge of the business card and he let himself feel the grain against his skin for an extended moment.

He hadn’t seen Hannibal a second time, but the knowledge that he was always possibly on campus was *a lot* . A *whole lot* . It felt like being stalked, but he was used to that on some level. As a reminder not to let his guard down, he decided to keep the card with him at all times.

That would have made sense for a few days, but with so much going on it just sort of slipped into Will’s daily habits, and here he was, day six of feeling an electric jolt at every corner. What was festering underneath was a twisted ball of jealousy, bitterness, and *intrigue* .

Will wanted to pick the knowledge that Hannibal even existed out of his mind with a pocket knife, flick it away like some piece of debris. Unfortunately, he also wanted something more, something as of yet undefined. Because of that, every morning after running the dogs and showering, he would go to the chair by the door and unclip his badge from yesterday’s used suit jacket and slip the card out in the same move. He would transfer the card to his new pocket and clip the badge on, then get on the road.

The day felt electric, as Beverly had texted him the night before to tell him that Zeller downright *hated* Doctor Lecter. Will wanted to know more, but it felt like giving in to ask through text. A funny part of him was whispering that Hannibal must have some good qualities if Zeller was acting out. Enemy of my enemy, and all that.

He cared more about how Price felt. He’d liked Price, even if the man did always seem a bit spooked by his presence. He had a strange sense of humor, and Will thought he was a pretty good judge of character.

He took a long sip of coffee and started in on the scones. He wasn't sure who was bringing in the pastries each morning, but he hoped they wouldn't stop any time soon. It was a much needed break from the packaged slices of crumb cake he always got at the gas station.

The coffee ran right through him and he stopped at the bathroom down the hall before his next class. He hated this bathroom. It was like the one in the Shining, and the red looked just about as dated.

He relieved himself and turned the water on to wash his hands. It felt so good that he bent forward and cupped his hands, splashing some of it over his closed eyes.

He felt someone enter, but didn't look up. He needed more of the cold water, and fumbled with the top button of his shirt to get some air on his skin. Every room in the building felt overly hot today and he wondered weakly what the electricity bill was for a building this large.

"We meet again."

Christ. Will shook his hands partially dry and rubbed them on his pants in agitation.

"Doctor Lecter," he grumbled, grabbing a paper towel and trying to dry his neck off.

"I thought we'd agreed on first names," Hannibal replied, washing his hands and smiling at Will through the mirror.

Will huffed out a pained laugh and Hannibal tilted his head to the side in interest. Will was twitchy this morning, irritation showing in his shoulders. Hannibal wet his lips and almost laughed himself as he was caught off guard by the rough quality in Will's voice.

"I didn't agree to a *damn* thing," Will ground out.

And there it was. He was cornered, and he felt that previously cooling anger spike in his stomach. He felt like shivering out of his body, like tearing something apart with his bare hands. He crushed the paper towels until the joints in his knuckles ground painfully together.

Hannibal felt the change in the air and looked down into the sink. The fear rolled off Will in waves and it was intoxicating.

"Not fond of eye contact," he said after a moment, voice gentle, forgiving.

Will snorted derisively. "Nope."

"I imagine what you see affects you deeply. A lot of moving variables with an empathy disorder," Hannibal continued, practically begging Will to bite. "Had problems in the past with persuasion? Hard to separate your wants from others?"

Will resolutely refused to look at the man. He felt a chill creep along his spine.

"Who's profile are you working on?" he whined, his sweat turning cold on his skin.

Hannibal adjusted directions, but refused to let up a bit.

"I apologize, Will," he said as neutrally as possible. "Just habit. I'm afraid it might happen again, and you'll have to forgive me a second time."

Will shook his head, trying to get himself under control. "Not if we never speak again," he grumbled.

Hannibal smiled at this. Every push was met with resistance and it made him ache to stick his fingers into Will and seek out where all his weak spots were, pin him down and see what would stop him struggling.

"Or we could be sociable," he suggested, "like adults."

"I'm not usually *sociable",* Will spit back, the word bitter on his tongue.

"Neither am I," Hannibal replied with a brief shrug.

That gave Will pause. He looked at Hannibal through the mirror for a second, and he looked so sincere that Will nearly believed him.

"You seem outgoing enough," he said, wondering how long it would take for someone to come in and interrupt this absurd dance.

"It's a front," Hannibal replied, leaning in as if he was giving something secret away.

That finally broke Will's composure and he let out a series of stuttered laughs, running a hand down his face and through the damp curls at his neck.

"You sure that front isn't just plain old narcissism, Doctor Lecter?" he asked, eyes finally meeting with a teasing cruelty.

Hannibal smiled slowly in response, lips pulling back, but eyes remaining black holes. There was a second where Will thought he was about to be tackled, the tension racketting up between them with no end in sight. His eyes caught on one of Hannibal’s prominent canines and the breath left his chest in one fell swoop.

Jack picked that moment to bust into the bathroom. He looked at Will, then Hannibal, then Will again.

"Here you are, Hannibal. I was just coming to get you," he said slowly, a hesitation in his voice that Will wasn't sure what to think of.

After standing there for a moment as if Will would read his mind and leave, Jack cleared his throat and tried again.

"Is there a reason you're still here Will?"

"I like the smell of urinal cakes," Will quipped, tossing the paper towels and standing his ground.

"In that case, why don't you come with me, Doctor," Jack said, arm going around Hannibal's shoulder.

"Good to see you, Will," Hannibal said as he left with Jack.

Will grunted.

Good to see you. Good to see you.

The phrase stuck in Will’s mind throughout the day, playing back over and over again. He would have felt better if Hannibal had told him to fuck off, but something in the back of his mind wondered if the man was actually happy to see him.

By the time he made it into bed that night, Will was ready for unconsciousness to clear his mind, nightmares be damned. He pulled the covers up to his shoulders and watched the dogs for a while. They were arranged haphazardly in front of the space heater, lounging in a smattering of aging dog and cat beds. Buster, the smallest of them, whined and rolled into his back, happily warming his belly.

Will looked at his phone one last time, really just to check the time, and was surprised to see he had a single missed message. It was from Beverly. He blinked a few times and read it.

Okay, so you know I'm not a fan of Freddie Lounds…but

There was a link below the text and Will didn't really think before clicking it.

The front page of TattleCrime flashed on his screen, banner at the top announcing in bold red letters that-

The FBI's new profiler might just be Baltimore's most wanted man!

Will's breath caught in his throat. Below the lettering, and indeed taking up the majority of his phone screen, was a photo.

Good to see you , his mind supplied.

In the photo, Hannibal was slightly bent at the waist, towel covering most of his face as he seemed to be drying his hair. The rest of him was...uncovered.

Apparently nude, going by the generous black box, Hannibal's body glistened with water. His head was rolled forward on his neck, trapezius well formed and leading down to muscled shoulders and a broad chest covered lightly in chest hair. His nipples stood erect, small and perfectly round. Will followed the lines of Hannibal's chest and stomach to where the trail of hair starting at his navel disappeared under the black box, then down muscled thighs and back up again.

Hannibal was turned slightly away from the camera, seemingly unaware of its presence, in what looked like an upscale locker room. The deep green leaves of a giant bird of paradise framed one side of the doorway, and two wooden benches faced the door.

Will was overwhelmed with a memory.

Sweaty palms wiped on his jeans, a stolen magazine kept hidden in the space between his bed and the frame. He smelled his own arousal in that space, hot breath puffing from his lungs as he flipped through the magazine slowly. One after another, the men on the pages revealed themselves to him over the backdrop of a college gym.

"Jesus," Will whispered, closing his eyes and turning his phone over on the covers. "Jesus."

Chapter End Notes

Can we get a round of applause from the audience for HANNIBAL'S TITS!?!

Teeth

Chapter Summary

Hannibal has a night in, and then sees his therapist. You know, like a normal person.

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes

Water flowed into a brass tub, oil and bubbles moving on the surface as the windows looking out onto the street steadily fogged.

The room stretched and throbbed in Hannibal's perception, senses clogged with sandalwood and musk, anticipation and his own sweat.

He removed his robe and folded it neatly before laying it down next to his phone on the end table that butted up against the tub. He tested the water and dried his hands on a plush towel before stepping in, feeling his cold toes burn in protest.

He chose the scents for the bath the way he composed; layering until the piece felt balanced. The innocuous plastic bag he removed from the side table held the last few notes; a paper towel that held the recently dried remnants of hand soap, sweat, and quite possibly Will Graham's shampoo. He wanted to really sink into it.

It had been a long day, after all. Jack had him working on the Shrike case, but he really would have preferred to not get in the killer's way. It was a difficult balance to keep; the gluttony he felt taking in the crimes, and the need to look like he was trying to solve them. It seemed like a much more interesting position from the outside, but now that he was in the guts of it he wasn't sure where he was supposed to be going.

Will Graham was a *much more* interesting prospect, and Hannibal thought about the prepped croissants chilling in the fridge for the morning with smug satisfaction. He enjoyed having a few irons in the fire.

His phone rang and he took a moment to let it, mouth twisting in disgust.

Besides the fact that his perfect bubble had now popped, it was well into the evening, and past office hours. He would have to *seriously* redefine some boundaries.

"Jack," he said, placing the unopened plastic sandwich bag back on his folded robe. "What can I do for you?"

The water level in the tub was high enough, so he cradled the phone to his shoulder and reached to turn off the taps.

“I wanted to get out ahead of this,” Jack said, voice slightly muffled. It sounded like he was driving. “I wasn’t sure if you’d seen it.”

The anger in Jack’s voice was palpable through the phone, though it didn’t seem to be directed at him.

“I don’t follow.”

“This may be a stupid question, but do you know TattleCrime?”

Jack went on, something about a website, about preparing himself, but Hannibal had already tuned him out. He opened the familiar blog on his phone, and licked his lips, mouth suddenly dry.

“I don’t know how she managed to take it,” Jack continued. “I’m having someone look into it for me, but I’m pretty sure we can get her on one count for the nudity. I just wanted you to know we’re working on it.”

Hannibal looked at what Freddie had done and let a smile overtake his face. *Oh, Miss Lounds* , he thought, *you are good* .

“There was no nudity, Jack,” he interrupted, good humor all but knocking down his usual prescribed neutrality.

“What?” Jack asked, sounding ever exasperated.

“I wear swimming briefs at the club,” Hannibal offered, waiting for Jack to catch up. “I admit the European cut leaves little to the imagination, however,”

“The black box is covering your swimwear,” Jack concluded, a sigh coming through the phone as he mulled it over. “So, if the bar was removed-“

“My dignity would remain intact,” Hannibal agreed.

“Well, that’s-“

“And if there’s nothing more, I’d like to get back to my evening.”

Jack apologized for the interruption and they shared tight pleasantries before saying goodbye. He sounded like he’d just been for a jog at the end of the call and Hannibal mentally congratulated Freddie Lounds for giving Jack such a scare.

He lifted his glass of wine from the carpet and slipped lower into the tub. His lips closed around the edge of the glass and he took a long pull, feeling all the messiness Jack had wrought with his little call as it slowly settled back down inside him. He closed his eyes and observed his own emotions from afar.

Fear. A reminder of the fact that he was alive.

Embarrassment. Not of use to him.

Shame. Only the glint in another man's eyes.

Anger. That old friend.

Alana had once said that fear was *Will's* greatest motivator. Hannibal could admit anger was his. Anger was not something to shy away from, but something to be cultivated, shaped, used. It was what kept him alive when he'd lost Mischa. It was there when his hunger could no longer be sated.

He felt his anger ease, felt it circle and lay down, the beast going back to sleep; the lick of flames ceasing.

Unable to resist the bait now that he was finally alone again, he looked at the screen of his phone and tapped through to read the article.

"I've met someone new."

In the doorway of her private residence, Bedelia Du Maurier stilled momentarily before letting Hannibal in. She remained his therapist against her own wishes, and Hannibal enjoyed the look of disappointment in her eyes each time he showed up for a session, impromptu or not.

"I would have thought you wanted to talk about the expose," she replied breathlessly, going to a bar cart to pour herself and Hannibal a glass of wine. She could hardly be in a room with him without some form of sedation.

Hannibal sank into a rust colored fanback chair and crossed his legs, hands clasped primly on his knee as he waited for her to settle. When she finally did, handing him a glass of Pinot, he grinned.

"I couldn't have paid for better press if I kept my own reporter."

He didn't clarify whether kept meant *paid* or *kidnapped.* Bedelia imagined the latter and felt her hand shake slightly as she brought her wine glass to her lips.

"The photo might bring in the wrong attention," she pressed.

Hannibal refused to comment on that, instead coming back to the reason he was there. "I said I've met someone new."

Bedelia sighed. What they did could hardly be called therapy. Instead, she felt like she was prostituting her friendship to the Devil. The Devil wasn't interested in introspection, no, he just wanted an audience.

"Tell me about them," she allowed.

"Him," Hannibal replied, smiling so she was once more reminded he was full of teeth. Full.

"Him," she replied.

"He's magnificent," Hannibal gushed. "I think he hates me."

Chapter End Notes

Okay, guys, let me know if you think that Hannibal went back into the bathroom later and smelled all of the crumpled up paper towels in the garbage to find the right one, or if this is a matter of surprisingly quick sleight of hand. 🥵👃🚮

Losing Sleep

Chapter Summary

Will has a reaction, and Hannibal finally gets to feed him breakfast in person.

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes

Will came to in shifts, becoming aware of the sounds of home first, muffled as if he was wrapped in cotton padding. The dogs' toenails tapped at the wooden floor, whines from a few of the nervous ones layered with the snuffling of them smelling him in turns. A warm muzzle against his bare arm brought the rest of his bodily sensations crashing in around him.

He was shivering, though he was still tucked into his warm bed up to the waist, and sweating through his clothes. The cool air seeping through the window kissed his skin and threw him into outright convulsions, head tipping back against his will with a *tic tic tic* of spasmodic muscle.

He realized that his phone was still in his hand as his hearing clarified and what first registered as a fire alarm going off showed itself to be someone calling him. He gasped out a series of breaths and fumbled to turn the thing off, thumb slipping over the screen, covered in sweat. When it finally quieted Will checked the screen and found four missed calls, all from Beverly.

Stumbling to his feet, he found his way to the bathroom and pulled a towel off the rod and another two from the adjoining closet. He shivered as he hushed the dogs and pulled his undershirt off, letting it fall to the floor as he went. He wrapped one of the towels around his shoulders and pulled back the bedsheets with a grimace. His sweat had soaked through the fitted sheet but he didn’t have a spare, so he lay one of the towels over the mark his lower body had left and jolted upwards as his phone started to ring again.

“Fucking, fucking, fucking,” he sputtered, reaching blindly for the phone in the tangle of covers the dogs were assessing on the floor.

He watched the screen go black as he held the power button down, Beverly’s number and his most immediate problems silenced along with it.

“Shh,” he managed, hands skittering from head to head as his pack circled the bed. “Alright, alright.”

When the dogs finally seemed to decide he was okay, reluctantly laying back in their beds, Will laid on the towel and pulled the other two over himself as closely as possible. His

eyelids fluttered closed as he curled in on himself, his knees almost to his chin, and suddenly *he remembered*.

It wasn't a dream, he knew, because he hadn't been asleep. For the life of him, he couldn't remember what he was doing right before his mind went into a trance. It seemed like his entire system had gone through a hard reset and he'd come out the other end slippery as a babe and blank behind the eyes. Blank, except what he remembered.

The vision unspooled again in his mind, blanketing him in a sense of profound loss. (*What have you lost, dear boy?*)

It started just as the one the week before, Will stuck in his childhood body, being tossed back and forth by the momentum of his dad's pickup. He felt the seatbelt dig into his waist and smelled the stale leftover smoke of the ashtray. His father was next to him, though Will couldn't peel his eyes from the road; the bleak night pierced by two headlights.

They pulled onto the dirt road and Will tried to ground himself by running his fingers over the bumpy texture of the upholstered seat cover under him, fingernails catching where threads came free from wear. He was struck by how many times he'd lived that precise moment.

Just as he felt his tongue loosen, a sound in his chest starting to build, they hit the deer.

He felt the impact overtake him, his small body jerked back as the sounds of crunching metal and glass mixed with the smell of gasoline and a whining sound he couldn't place. In real life, he had stayed in the cab for a long while before getting out to find his father, but in this permutation, this bastardized review, time rolled forward with breakneck speed and he was hovering over the dying deer.

His father was off to the side, inspecting the damage, and young Will fell to his knees in front of the mangled beast. His eyelids seemed glued wide as he felt the warmth of the animals' hide under his hands.

The deer was much bigger than it had been in real life, and the antlers that clacked and scraped against the asphalt were wholly new. The curve of them imitated the curve of broken ribs, ribs that peeked out from skin, skin torn and bloody. The bones were a dazzling white, a perfect reminder that they weren't meant to be out here, braving the elements in this dirty world, but rather tucked safely inside.

Where is the boundary? How can I keep myself from spilling out as well? Spilling hot and angry onto the cold ground.

The vision stuttered and Will felt burning tears run down his face, felt his whole being swell and burst as he heard himself screaming, screaming. His fingers felt along the deer's rib cage as it struggled for breath. Hot, it was so hot, the slide of fur over muscle, the blood foaming at its mouth.

Hands gripped his shoulders, trying to pull him away, and his whole body arched as though he'd been hooked up to high volt electricity. His fingers gripped the deer's hide and he saw

light first swell and then arrest his vision as it took over the whole of the stag and rushed through him.

Shaking. Shaking. The sound of a car's horn blared in his ears and his head fell back as a blinding light rushed forth from his open mouth and eyes, illuminating the scene for a brief moment before-

Darkness.

The scene started over.

Safe in his dad's pickup, pulling onto the dirt road. Will felt the warmth of the cab as a hand on his throat.

No. No. He couldn't do it again! Once was enough, once was too much.

Will's hands gripped the seatbelt, but he was too small and the buckle refused to budge, even as he pushed both thumbs as hard as he could. His own breath in his ears was the only thing he could hear at first, but it was soon overtaken by a deep and monotonous *buzzing* .

His eyes trained on the road ahead as a sense of impending doom shook him to his core. He couldn't turn his head, couldn't look away as they plowed along, but he *felt* the difference. Out of the corner of his eye, what should have been his father's outline was undulating. Gasoline again in his nostrils, he felt himself gag as the deer jumped out of the clearing.

Rending metal. Scattering glass. The burnt smell of rubber pushed to its limits, and that damned horn.

His body was thrown around again like a rag doll and Will sobbed as time spun quickly. His eyes unwilling to open, he felt himself yank the door open, his feet taking him to the place where the stag coughed and juddered under one hanging headlight. His knees took his full weight and he tried to focus on the bite of gravel through his jeans as a form loomed over him.

"I don't want to." His body trembled but his eyes were resolutely closed. "Please, no."

You must.

Hands on his shoulders, a growing cacophony of horns and whines and that buzzing. He opened his eyes.

The stag stared up at him through one black eye and he fell forward, his hands landing on warm fur. *No. Please.* The stag blinked and wheezed, and took one last strangling breath and he found he was crying again and gripping the fur. His fingers stretched and clenched in succession, trying to comfort the beast in any way he could.

Instead of pulling him back, the hands on his shoulders ran slowly down his arms, a frighteningly large body surrounding him completely until it seemed to envelope his own. He felt the *huff huff* of easy breath in his ear and was unable to move as the hands gripped and pushed his own harder into the fur.

The blaring horn turned into a siren and the hanging headlight pulsed and flickered as his vision cleared, and he was able to finally see the hand. It was much larger than his and the blurring of the edges made sense as Will realized with horror that the stranger was made up of a swelling mass of horse-flies.

Will didn't get much sleep. That, he assured himself, was why he let Hannibal Lecter into his car.

He was up at five and out in the biting wind with most of his pack. Winston, Harley and Buster ran off ahead, as Max and Ellie watched from the porch after leaving a message on a tree. *Leave a message, leave a message* , he'd murmured. The smallest ones circled the most, attempting not to get pissed on. Zoe didn't even come out to pee, too in love with the space heater and her own bed to leave it before Sunrise, and Will didn't blame her.

Jack trotted along at his flank, the dog's erect ears listening to his siblings in the dark. Jack had been holding off from the pack for about a week, staying close to Will when he could and scenting the air like he could feel some storm rolling into town. As much as Will was worried that the dog's senses might end up trumping his, he was glad to see that Winston, the most recent addition to the pack, was straying farther than his heel to play with the others.

He'd spent a good few hours after that working on some lures at his bench and then driven to work early just to get out of his house. He needed a major change of scenery if he was going to focus on anything but the waking nightmare of the night before.

That he ended up nodding off in the car in his parking spot at Quantico was understandable.

The light *knock knock knock* on the window made him breath in and wake immediately, but it took a moment for Will to get his faculties back. The face looking in on him didn't help, but at least the man was good enough to give him the time to slip his glasses back on in self defense. Will fiddled with the buttons on the door panel and lowered the window on the passenger side an inch and cleared his throat.

"What can I do for you, Doctor Lecter?"

Hannibal licked his lips and tried not to look at Will like he wanted to eat him whole. Luckily, the window had fogged up real quick and only a small part of his face was visible.

"Actually," he said, "this is more about what I can do for you."

He held the thermos of coffee up sideways so Will could see what he meant and grinned to himself when he heard the telltale click of the doors unlocking. Will looked exhausted, if not slightly deranged, his hair stuck down on one side and a look in his eyes that Hannibal pinpointed immediately; Will was haunted.

"I only just saw you sleeping and figured I should catch you now," Hannibal explained as he slid into the confining front seat with as much ease as he could muster. "I'd hate to think your first cup of the day might be what they offer in the teacher's lounge."

Will grunted in affirmation, but refused to smile. He couldn't be bought with coffee, but that didn't mean he'd turn it down. Hannibal unscrewed the lid of an unreasonably phallic thermos and Will's body lit up with warning signals, heat dancing along his skin in the cramped space like he might self-immolate. Instead, he gulped down the end of the coffee from his travel mug and held it out. Hannibal raised an eyebrow, but didn't protest.

"What were you doing in the teacher's lounge?" Will asked, smelling the coffee as it poured and thinking he might actually be able to be bought after all.

Something stung Hannibal by the looks of it, but he fixed his gaze on the insulated bag at his feet and his face smoothed again.

"I taught a summer session three years ago on the evolutionary origins of social exclusion," he replied, voice neutral as ever.

Will felt his face heat further and he tried not to clench his jaw too tight, ready for the good doctor to tell him all about his own childhood. Instead, after a moment, Will was presented with a dinner plate sized Tupperware container, lid lifted to release the build up of steam. He took it after a momentary hesitation.

"I always end up making more than I can eat," Hannibal explained.

Will had a response ready for whatever pretentious shit might be inside. He imagined steamed snails on beds of endive, but his retort died in his mouth when he lifted off the lid. He hummed in satisfaction, suddenly reminded that he hadn't eaten breakfast, and took a huge bite of the sandwich. He was in bliss. Wondering if he'd ever eaten anything so divine, he let his head rest back and his eyes close as he chewed.

"I didn't, uh, I didn't take you for a ham and cheese sandwich kind of guy," he admitted, going for another bite with fierce concentration.

Hannibal's jaw worked for a moment before he was able to respond. "A croque monsieur on croissant is hardly a ham and cheese," he countered.

Will nearly choked on his next bite, chewing purposely until he had room enough in his mouth for speech. "Well, where I come from, Doctor Lecter, pork is pork."

He missed the look that passed over Hannibal's face like a shadow, but did glance up in time to see a real smile emerge. Hannibal said something about it being a matter of opinion, but they were smiling at each other then and Will missed it, too caught up in the diffused morning light catching on Hannibal's eyelashes and the sparse white-blond hairs of his eyebrows. He was quite striking when he wasn't hovering in a doorway like the dead, Will decided.

But that was beside the point.

"Croque Monsieur," he giggled, taking another big bite of the sandwich as he rolled his eyes. "Do you hear yourself?"

Hannibal continued to smile easily, warmed by the gentle ribbing. “You Americans always think a thing is pretentious if it is French in origin. It’s a wonderfully filling meal, and you can find it in any cafe in France. It’s a meal of the people, a staple.”

“Then what makes this hardly a ham and cheese?” Will pushed back. His thumb was covered in sauce so he quickly cleaned it with his tongue. “Besides the croissant of course.”

Hannibal saw time stretching out for years ahead of them. He saw a million and one permutations of this conversation, each catching the light like the facet of a gemstone.

“Nutmeg,” he answered.

“Nutmeg?” Will asked, looking down at the last bite of his sandwich like he might be able to see a whole seed in there like an almond.

“The béchamel is a simple but true recipe. You add butter, flour, pepper, and nutmeg to heated milk, then the remaining gruyere. It’s the sauce that makes it croque monsieur, rather than a ‘ham and cheese’.”

Will shook his head as he finished the last bite, hands going to his slacks to brush off the crumbs there.

“Are you having trouble sleeping, Will?” Hannibal asked, voice low and concerned in a way that sent trepidation up Will’s spine.

He drank down the end of the coffee and stuck the travel mug back in the drink holder, letting his hand rest on the keys in the ignition for a moment. He begged for something to ground him, to keep all the pieces of him that kept breaking off from blowing away in the wind.

“Do you know when you’re trying to carry too many apples at a time?” he asked. “One just keeps slipping out of your hands and you’re pressing bruises in them to try to stretch your hand wide enough to pick up a few more. Every time you lean down you lose another one.”

The silence between them was perfect, and could have stretched on forever.

“Anyhow,” Will said, taking the keys from the ignition and opening his door. “I’ve got a class to teach.”

Chapter End Notes

What if we kissed, but we were both boys and you were a mass of swarming flies 👅💋🌚😈👌👹

Greed

Chapter Summary

> Beverly shows up to let us see what our boys look like from the outside, and Hannibal finally talks to Will about a case.

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes

Beverly was worried about him. Will had never refused to answer the phone when she called, and he had avoided half a dozen calls the night before. The first time she called was because he hadn't replied to the text, the remainder of the calls were out of habit; she was used to getting through to Will unless he was at the river.

She shouldn't have let it get to her, but after sending the link to that article she had wondered if it was too far. Sure, she teased Will a bit here and there, but she didn't want to pick at an open wound. She wondered if that was what Lecter was to Will, still open and fresh. She knew there had been something happening over the summer between him and Alana, and now that she knew Alana and Lecter were also close, she could see where that could become a problem.

All of those thoughts fell away as she spied Will across the parking lot.

He was talking, head tilted to the side and leaning against his car as Hannibal pulled his own things from the passenger side. They were *close*, if only amicably so, and as she watched, they started to walk onto campus together. She was struck by the way Lecter was watching Will. If anyone looked at her like that she'd probably have to just fuck them in the janitor's closet before work.

As they rounded the last car Beverly fell back behind the trunk of a tree to watch. She tried not to look like she was spying on them, phone in her hand like she was looking something up. They continued talking though they never got close enough for her to make anything out, and just as the doors opened Hannibal let his hand rest low on Will's back, almost possessive.

Okay, she thought, *good for you, Graham.*

She tried not to wonder how Will was coping with the fact that possibly hundreds of proud Marylanders had recently gotten off to a risqué photo of his new *friend*. At least the Internet was fairly anonymous.

The next morning, Hannibal met Will at his car. And the next. He brought a different breakfast dish each time and they spoke of little besides the food. It was a comfortable habit and Hannibal wanted to keep it that way, but he also desperately wanted to see into Will's mind.

That Friday he brought a protein scramble, fluffy eggs with flavorful sausage, and some fresh orange juice along with the usual coffee. They were finishing up when he broached a new subject.

"I think we're closing in on the Shrike."

Will froze for a second, his mind lighting up with all the things he knew about the open case from Beverly and the local news. Missing girls, all alike. Nothing had been found, and they were on something like number eight.

"Are they still calling them abductions?" Will asked, fork stabbing the last of the sausage.

"They were until this week," Hannibal replied, watching Will's lips close around the fork as he chewed thoughtfully.

"What changed?"

Hannibal smiled to himself and leaned in conspiratorially. "We have our first piece of evidence. Before, there was nothing to be found."

"Nothing?" Will's brain flicked through all the normal contaminants; fingerprints, hair follicles, saliva and blood.

"Nothing." Hannibal sounded almost breathless.

Will thought about that, aware of how carefully Hannibal was feeding him bits of information. He didn't like to be manipulated, and this ran right up to the edge.

"Does Jack know you're talking to me about this," he pressed, looking for the first time that morning to Hannibal's face. "I told him I wouldn't consult on any more cases."

Hannibal seemed to consider. "Jack doesn't need to know," he decided out loud. "This isn't consultation, just conversation."

Will weighed his own curiosity with what he remembered of Jack's wrath, and gave in. "What evidence did you find?"

Hannibal explained how the Shrike had returned Elise Nichols to her bed, whole after he put her liver back in. He mentioned the piece of metal Beverly had found and what Price and Zeller thought of the antler velvet in two of the wounds. All in all, it was an outright feast of evidence, and Will knew with sudden clarity that the Shrike was about to be caught.

"Why would he put her back in her bed?" Will pondered aloud. "They still haven't found the other bodies, correct?"

“Not even a strand of hair,” Hannibal agreed.

“He’s keeping them all to himself,” Will said, an image of the killer coming into his mind. He felt a wave of avarice wash over him with sudden force, his throat closing up as he tried to swallow, tried to breathe. He felt full and hungry in turns and pressed his thumbs into the crease of his closed eyes as it overtook him. “He’s greedy for them, but whatever he did to the others, he couldn’t do it to her.”

“How is he greedy?” Hannibal murmured, delighted by the prospect of seeing Will *understand* . “Why would he let this one go?”

“They’re like copies he’s collecting,” Will tried, his eyes remaining closed so he could see better. “This one didn’t match, so he had to put her back. He didn’t keep her because she was...abnormal.”

“She had liver cancer.”

All the pieces started to fit into place and Will breathed deeply, sure he could smell the copper tang of blood. Hannibal watched as Will’s mouth twisted and his eyes fluttered open.

“He’s eating them,” Will concluded with a small nod of his head, easy as that. Hannibal let out a sound and Will turned to him, looking a bit flustered. “What?”

“Nothing,” Hannibal assured him. “It’s just that, well, Jack said you have a knack for the monsters. I can see why now.”

Will snorted, mind changing gears. “What else did Jack have to say about me?”

And that question was so easy, so plain on Will’s tongue. Hannibal wanted to climb into his lap and whisper every last thing Jack had said into Will’s ear, wanted to feel how his body moved in response. He wanted to tell Will what Alana thought too, what the whole team whispered behind his back, if only to have the man to himself. Greed seemed incredibly in fashion all of the sudden.

“Oh, he’s desperate to have you back. He thinks what you do is a kind of magic,” Hannibal said with a smile. “He’s afraid he’ll never get your opinion again after the last case. Did he ride you hard and put you away wet, Will?”

Will shook his head and his lips tightened, jaw clicking as it tensed. “The evidence always backs me up, and he isn’t the reason I’m not consulting.”

Hannibal let the silence spool out between them then. He wanted to know more, but he felt they’d met in the middle up to that point and didn’t want to ruin the mood.

“Well, be careful out there,” Will said after a few moments.

Hannibal smiled at the notion that he would ever need protection. “Finish your breakfast.”

Chapter End Notes

Short chapter because I’ve spent way too many hours on the road in the past two days. Enjoy, loves.

Blood In The Water

Chapter Summary

Will finally catches up with Bev, and Hannibal meets the Minnesota Shrike.

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes

That Saturday, just after sunrise, Beverly's little Jeep appeared in Will's driveway in a cloud of dust. Will welcomed her and let the dogs out, promising he'd be right back with coffee.

"You've been on radio silence for a while," Beverly said, sitting down on the porch for a short break after the long drive to Wolf Trap. "Glad you finally returned my calls."

"Mmm," Will agreed, shouldering his way onto the porch with two mugs of steaming coffee. "Sorry about that."

"It's fine, just glad you aren't dead."

Will sat in the chair next to her and handed over one of the mugs, eyes still on the dogs as they played and sniffed around Beverly's car tires. Whatever she'd brought in definitely piqued their interest.

"I've been busy with the case," Beverly added. "This guy is a real sicko."

Will's nose scrunched up at that, but he took a long sip of his coffee and let the stab of something go.

"Doctor Lecter said you're getting close to catching him. Shouldn't you be in Minnesota?" he asked.

He didn't see the smile Beverly gave and that was fine. He was still uncertain about how he felt about Lecter, and he didn't need anyone else's opinion coming in to muddy his own. It was hard to keep a clear head when you weren't sure where your own reactions ended and the reactions of others began.

"Price and Zeller are there," she explained with a weak wave of her hand. "I volunteered to stay behind and run some things through our system." She looked at her watch and added, "Soon. Can't stay much longer."

Will hummed and sat back in his chair. He knew there was something she wanted to say, but he wasn't going to fight her for it.

“You kinda changed your tune about Lecter, huh?”

And there it was.

“He’s still a pretentious prick,” Will said with little feeling. “But I suppose I can see the appeal.”

“Oh, yeah?”

“He cooks,” Will said, allowing himself a small upwards twitch of his lips as he glanced at Beverly over his glasses, eyelashes fluttering a bit in mock adoration.

Beverly chuckled at that and nudged him with her foot. “And you could stand to gain a few pounds.”

Will shrugged. He knew it was true. He barely filled out his Hanes undershirts anymore. Food had somehow slipped his mind before Lecter came along. He forgot why.

“I only want what’s best for you, little bro,” Beverly added, seeing the way Will’s eyes had gone blank in thought.

There was something that didn’t sit right with her about Hannibal Lecter, but she still couldn’t pinpoint it. Maybe he was just too well put together.

“I can take care of myself, Bev,” Will said, his voice gentle and convivial. He *had* missed her.

“Yeah, well, if you ever have to frame him for murder,” she teased. “What’s his house like?”

“No clue.”

They sipped their coffee and sat in the comfortable silence for a bit.

“Did you ever read Freddie’s article on him?” Beverly asked after a moment.

Will’s mouth fell open as he worked that over. “Ah, nope,” he admitted. “Didn’t make it past the front page.”

He raised his eyebrows at her suggestively and she laughed, but there was also something in Will’s frame that changed. He was more guarded, and something quick and dark passed over his face.

“Well,” she replied, “you let me know before he takes you to the opera the first time. I can give you that special talk.”

Rolling his eyes and laughing, Will tried to picture himself at an opera house, but his mind came up blank.

“There’s no promise ring,” he admitted. “Don’t even know if he’s…”

Beverly came to his rescue after a moment, and he was grateful.

“Whatever he is,” she said, taking the last gulp of her coffee and standing up to find her keys, “he likes you.”

Be careful, she wanted to say. Instead, she said her goodbyes and let Will walk her to her car.

Monday morning came and busted through the walls keeping Will together. He felt split open, *flayed.*

It was all over the news; the Minnesota Shrike was dead, along with his family and two officers. An old photo of Hannibal in a tux at an arts benefit, cropped to just his face, was in the corner of every screen. The news of his struggle with the killer seemed to bump him up from esteemed local legend to national treasure in a heartbeat, though none of the sources could confirm he had been discharged from the hospital.

Will watched them talk about Hannibal and his close call, an itch going up and down his spine. The sudden protective impulse was thick on his tongue, and he worried it might take him off a bridge on his drive to work if he wasn’t careful.

He sat in his car in the parking lot before class for a whole half hour, alone, before he pulled his phone from his pocket and frantically texted Beverly. She said Hannibal was on campus in forensics, and that he was fine, but nothing could stop Will’s legs from beating the path to the lab. He didn’t even reply to her, he might not have locked his car.

It was all going surreal and syrupy around him as he made his way through the halls to the building that held the forensics department and the lab in the basement. His ears were ringing as he took the stairs down two at a time.

He would be fine if he could just *see* Hannibal. He just needed to make sure he was okay before this terrible thing tightening in his chest made him bite his own tongue off.

“Will,” Hannibal said in recognition as the final door opened.

Hannibal was sitting between Jack and Alana, the two of them breathing his air, touching gently at him as Will walked in. He looked so relaxed there, upper body seeming almost naked in just his shirt and waistcoat. Without his usual suit jacket, the padding covering the main stab wound was visible under his shirt. Will looked him over quickly before turning and going back out to the hallway to breathe.

Sounds of shuffling and hushed voices died down, and Hannibal opened the door and joined Will where he was pacing, agitated.

“You didn’t show up,” Will said, hands in his hair. “I saw the news and you didn’t show up, and I thought. I- I don’t know what I thought.”

“Forgive me,” Hannibal replied.

“You don’t need to-” Will started, finally breathing as Hannibal stilled.

Will's mind was spinning, angry at the way Hannibal had looked sitting between Jack and Alana, his protective impulse bleeding steadily into a possessiveness he couldn't quite swallow down.

As the hall grew silent, Will's thoughts parted to give way to the sounds of their breathing and the tinny *tick tock* of the hallway clock. He finally looked up, taking in every scrape and bruise covering Hannibal's neck and hands. He longed for the ones not shown so easily.

"I told you to be careful," he whispered, weak, broken. His eyes were again on the floor, and he felt Hannibal's gaze on him like a burning weight.

Hannibal smiled, finger going to tilt Will's chin back up. It was the first time he'd actually touched Will, and Will's skin was on fire.

"While I can permit your worrying," he said, hand going back to his side, "I'm wondering what you would have me say to you, if our places were reversed."

Will sighed and let his shoulders fall.

"We're more alike than you think, Will," Hannibal continued.

Will grumbled and shuffled his feet, not sure what he was meant to say to that.

"And now we have matching wounds," Hannibal pondered, almost wistfully. "What will time say about that, I wonder."

All the air left Will's chest, and he looked up with such undisguised interest that Hannibal almost looked away. Will was searching his face, looking for something. Hannibal let his head fall slightly back, allowing the perusal and baring his throat as Will moved closer.

"What did you just say?"

Hannibal paused for a moment, unsure which footfall would bring him down. This was a new Will Graham, and he was quickly showing himself to be something different entirely. Will looked at Hannibal straight on and took a step forward, invading Hannibal's personal space. It was intoxicating.

"What will time-" Hannibal started.

"No. Shut up. Not that," Will spat, his chest rising and falling with quickening breath. "Matching wounds. Who? Who told you about my shoulder?"

Ah, Hannibal thought, *slight misstep*.

"Beverly mentioned-" he tried, wanting in equal measure to calm the beast blooming in Will's chest and to *feed* it.

Will cut him off with a cold, sharp laugh. He was looking Hannibal over now like he could find some loose thread, some slick opening to pry.

“Stop. Stop lying. What are you doing?” Will snapped.

Memories of their breakfasts together lit up in Will’s mind in quick succession. Every gentle word, every easy smile looked wrong through this new lense.

Hannibal, presenting himself at Will’s classroom.

Hannibal, showing up in the bathroom.

Hannibal, baking all those pastries.

Hannibal, slipping into Will’s car.

Will’s stomach flipped, all that sweetness turning into bile in the back of his throat.

“What are you doing?” he repeated. “What are you trying to do? Who the hell are you?”

Hannibal tried to smile, but the angry little thing Will had become wasn’t interested in being gentled, it wanted a fight. They were being pulled together by something vicious, almost chest to chest, and Hannibal wondered what kind of cosmic change was taking place that he could feel his own body retreat, his back hitting the wall.

“Will,” he choked out, arousal and a primal tightness flooding his stomach in sick waves. *Oh*, how he wanted to be taken down, how he wanted to *drown* in this man.

They stood there, huffing for a few slow seconds before Hannibal’s spine grew back. He didn’t tell his hand to reach towards Will’s wrist, so close with them nearly touching, didn’t tell it to take Will’s pulse. He battled with that, not used to doing things so impulsively, as his fingers smoothed across hot skin, two slipping under the cuff of Will’s shirt.

Will searched his eyes, eyebrows furrowing. What it was that he found there, Hannibal wasn’t sure. All he knew was that Will was raising his hand and those eyes wouldn’t stop searching and he was sure Will was going to touch his face, he was sure of it. He held perfectly still, telling his body to relax, to allow Will whatever he saw fit to take.

Will’s fingers stilled over the hidden bandage on his shoulder, and *pushed* .

Pain bloomed in Hannibal’s shoulder and he did everything he could to let the flaring of his nostrils and the hot puff of air that left him be the only sign of discomfort. He swallowed thickly, blinking, and watched Will’s upper lip pull back. It was hardly a smile.

“Forgive me,” he finally whispered, a perfect copy of the plea at the beginning of their conversation.

Will pushed two fingers harder into the wound and blood came to the surface, staining Hannibal’s perfect white shirt *crimson* .

A sound came from their left and Jack walked out into the hall. He probably said Will's name a few times, but all Will could hear was the crashing of waves. He finally stepped back to allow Hannibal to leave, but the man didn't budge.

"Am I interrupting something?"Jack's voice finally broke through, tone growing demanding as he saw the blood seeping through Hannibal's shirt.

When Will didn't respond, Hannibal spoke up.

"Will was just leaving," he said.

Will let out a huff and turned to do so, but Hannibal wasn't done with him.

"Do you by any chance still have my business card?" he implored, voice preternaturally calm again.

Will felt like laughing, but he thought if he did that he wouldn't be able to stop.

The business card . That little piece of paper that was supposed to remind Will to stay on his guard. It had failed him, or he had failed himself. Will supposed if the man wanted it back he could *fucking* have it. He pulled it from his pocket and jabbed it towards Hannibal.

Jack watched as Hannibal took a pen from his pocket, and the card, and turned to write something on the back of it. From where Jack was standing, it looked like a phone number. Hannibal passed the card back over and Will took it after a second. Jack let out a breath, but tried to remain stoic in his expression. He supposed it was better that they were fucking than fighting, but either way he didn't need to see it.

"Contact me whenever you wish," Hannibal told Will. "Day or night."

Jack had to turn to hide the rolling of his eyes as Will stormed off and Doctor Lecter composed himself. He was not being paid enough for all this. Not by a long shot.

Chapter End Notes

Listened to this on repeat while coming with this chapter.

https://open.spotify.com/track/3s59RmZodBLONwK3t4Hbci?si=6uMDke5gTsm08s0GTyXd2Q

Basically

Chapter Summary

Will doesn't allow his run in with Hannibal to disrupt his day too much.

Will felt *crazy.* He hated when people used that term, but it was the only word that came close to the turmoil brewing in him at that moment. He looked at himself in the mirror and didn't recognize his reflection. He wanted to pry his mouth open with both hands and go digging for the thing inside him that turned like a knife. *What had he even done?* He had basically assaulted a colleague.

Basically.

Basically.

Basically.

He ran his hands under the hot water again and scrubbed the tips of his fingers where they had been stained with blood. He still felt wrong. The bell rang through the building signaling the changing of classes and he cursed under his breath and dried his hands quickly. If there was one thing he wouldn't let happen, it was a disruption to his class schedule.

He gave his lectures through a haze, and drove home without even noticing a thing. He knew what dissociation was, obviously, but it felt much much deeper this time. He fed the dogs and got out a bottle of whiskey and sat on the edge of his bed. There was no use for a glass, and he took a long pull before screwing the cap back on so it wouldn't spill.

He turned the card over in his hands and looked at the fresh phone number written there.

He still didn't understand exactly what was going on, but he knew something was happening that he just wasn't permitted to see. He wanted to call the bastard up and ask him what exactly he wanted.

What if it's you?

What if it's not?

He couldn't decide which prospect was more frightening; being the focus of this slippery man's interest, or being a means to an end. Was the coffee and breakfast they'd been having just another way for Hannibal to ingratiate himself to the group?

Something bucked inside him like a wild horse at the thought that their meetings hadn't been as private as he'd believed. He wanted to strike out and dissolve in equal measures.

Will thought of the way Hannibal had looked sitting between Alana and Jack, reminiscent of a favored knight just come home from battle and consulting with the crown. Alana had rested her hand on Hannibal's knee and looked at him with so much adoration that it was clear in Will's mind for maybe the first time that she hadn't really been falling for him over the summer. She'd never looked at him like that. (He wasn't sure anyone ever had.)

He took another drink.

Of course . Of course, he'd been right all along. Hannibal was bad news, and was going to replace him, and that was just going to have to be fine. He would keep his head down, keep his distance, and just focus on his little life. He didn't want to deal with the publicity, after all, and Hannibal's star was only just beginning to rise. There might even be a handful of morning show interviews in Hannibal's future, he thought with disgust.

He fumbled to open the bottle again and took a swig before screwing the cap on for the final time and leaning down to slide it out of reach under the bed. Out of sight, out of mind.

Sitting there, the beginnings of a buzz coming on as warmth flowed through him, he almost tore the card in half. *Almost.*

The next morning, Will got right out of his car the second it was parked, and kept his eyes on the ground as he walked onto campus. There were more reporters there than the day before, but they weren't interested in him. He walked right past the throng of them and into his classroom.

He arrived with enough time to really prep for the day's lessons, so there were only a few students in the room as he pulled out his notebook and binder for the class. Their voices were low as they talked, but he picked up bits and pieces; enough to know they were talking about the Shrike. He didn't hear Hannibal approach.

"Jesus," he said under his breath, almost knocking into the man as he turned back to the desk.

"Good morning, Will," Hannibal said, voice low and exuding apology. "Lunette aux abricots."

Will blinked several times and looked at the cardboard box Hannibal was holding in one hand, the familiar coffee thermos in the other. Adrenaline soured his stomach, but he did question briefly just how bad it might possibly be to take Hannibal's gifts. *That's what he's counting on,* he decided.

"I ate on the way," he said, turning his back on Hannibal to go through his papers with blind eyes.

"On the way," Hannibal repeated, maybe to himself.

“I got a CrunchWrap Supreme from Taco Bell,” Will lied easily. “And they bought a new Nespresso Vertuo for the lounge, so…”

He couldn’t help but glance up when Hannibal didn’t respond, if only for a moment. Hannibal’s face was completely blank, and Will felt a righteous laugh building, but luckily Hannibal spoke before it broke loose.

“CrunchWrap Supreme.”

Will looked between Hannibal's face and the box in his hand and rolled his eyes. “Yes. I ate.”

A long moment drew out between them, Hannibal taking a step back and holding the cardboard box over his midsection like the worst armor ever fashioned.

“Dinner tonight, then,” Hannibal finally said. “My place or yours?”

“I’m busy,” Will spat.

“For the rest of your life?” Hannibal pressed, ducking his head to catch Will’s eyes and looking like he was back on solid ground.

Will felt a flush go up his neck, renewed visions of pressing the man against a wall. He could still feel where their bodies had met like a brand. His hand brushed over his thigh to chase the feeling away.

“This isn’t the time or place, Hannibal,” he chided.

It was the first time Will had used his first name, as far as Hannibal could remember, and it set fireworks off in Hannibal’s mind. He swore flowers were blooming in the air all around them, nectar thick and fragrant. He tipped his head in agreement, for a moment unable to speak. It felt like a monumental step, the breaking down of one of the load bearing walls Will had put up.

“I agree wholeheartedly,” he finally replied, licking his lips and smiling with just his eyes. “We’ll take the conversation up over dinner tonight. Your place or mine?”

They were almost whispering now, bending over the edge of the desk to invade each other’s space.

“You’re relentless,” Will breathed out.

“You have no idea,” Hannibal replied, the smile now pulling at his face and making Will’s stomach do somersaults.

Students started to stream in the door, a few of them taking seats close enough to the front to make Will vibrate with irritation. He could tell Hannibal to fuck off right now, could proclaim his indifference in front of a crowd and let the stranger's eyes drive the point home.

“Breakfast, tomorrow,” he finally allowed, leaning in to try to keep all his bleeding emotions tucked in the little bubble they were in.

Hannibal looked too pleased, so he felt he had to clarify.

“In my car.”

His skin was overheating under Hannibal’s appraisal and he needed this little sparring match to be over.

Hannibal nodded once in agreement and turned to go. Will felt all his strength leave him and had to sit for a moment to gather himself. His stomach growled, but he'd always been good at self denial.

How Are You Feeling?

Chapter Summary

> Will runs into, if not away from, Alana. Hannibal prepares for breakfast. Someone gets a midnight text.

The last class of the day closed at seven, the sun already long gone by that point. Will enjoyed evening classes because no one stared out the window. He liked to say that he only spoke *at them* , the students, but he did want them to take in what he was saying. He wouldn't say it if it wasn't important. He hated the kind of teacher that went off on tangents.

Alana arrived at his classroom, or at least the one he was teaching in that hour, just as the bell rang. She stood off to the side, shoulder resting on the wall as Will tied things up.

"Don't just pick an approach," he said, "compare the two first. You might end up with a different result than your classmates, and that's okay. Due Friday, people."

The students milled out and Will turned off the projector with a nod for Alana to come in. He felt different now, seeing her.

"Hello Will," she said, smiling at him with something akin to pity. "How are you feeling?"

She asked him that a lot, but this was the first time he felt like she was speaking as a school nurse. He wanted to tell her to shut up. Instead, he answered honestly.

"I have no idea."

Her smile went soft at that. "Jack said that when you and Hannibal-"

And that was about all he could take. He didn't need anyone, let alone Alana, looking sideways at him.

"Jack says a lot of things," he said with a wave of his hand. "Not like you to listen."

She sighed and attempted another approach, and all Will could do was hang onto the edge of the desk he was sitting on.

"I've known Hannibal for quite some time," she said. "He has a way of making some people...nervous."

"I'm not nervous," Will countered, fingernails digging into the desk. "I'm, I'm doing better...than before."

Alana looked at him for a moment, trying to catch his eye. He remained stalwart, eyes fixed to a spot of wear on the low pile carpet. He felt like if he could relax his eyes enough he would be able to sink into the carpet and be one with the grit.

“I just want you to know that if you ever need to talk,” she started. That made him look up. “I know quite a few really good therapists in town.”

Oh, he thought, *oh no.*

He smiled, or at least tried to, and stood to grab his bag. He kept his mouth shut as she stood there looking at him, and walked right out the fucking door.

No thank you . He didn’t need a therapist, and he didn’t need to be reminded that Alana wasn’t really his friend. What he needed was a good run and a shower and to sleep until he absolutely had to be awake again. He didn’t think she said anything before the door closed between them, and he didn’t care.

The firelight played across Hannibal’s face as he lined the butterfly needle up to a gorgeously plump vein and eased it in. Years of practice made the move mostly painless, and he leaned back in his chair with a sigh after adjusting the tubing and allowing for the blood to start its way into a small glass jar.

He let his mind wander to the hallway beneath Quantico as his eyelids drifted closed. He thought of the fire in Will’s eyes, the way those eyes had searched him. Will was unpredictable, and he would have to remember to be more careful. Usually, he was able to speak with enough confidence that people didn’t notice the small adjustments to the truth he made. A flush of something came over him as he checked the glass bottle.

If Will wanted his blood, and he seemed almost desperate for it at the time, then Hannibal would provide. It was almost poetic to him; what he was planning to serve. Cow and pig blood were used in dishes over most of the world, but few recipes were as well suited to desire as sanguinaccio dolce. He would nourish Will, enter his body and become part of him with this dish. The thought brought a hitch to his breath and he let his hand rest between his legs, feeling himself grow hard against the heel of his palm as he watched his own blood flow through the plastic line.

He would have liked to have taken some of the blood from the Hobbes scene, what they were calling it now that the man had been unmasked, but there was no time. There had been so much blood, and it felt repugnant not to use some of it, but he had to keep his cover. He remembered standing in front of Hobbes as the man slit his daughters throat, how he had taken a step back to spare his own shoes. Pity he’d been covered in it by the time he left, he would have to speak to his dry cleaner to see what had been salvaged.

The suit jacket and shirt were long gone, as the blade one of the cops used to stab him had met with little resistance. Should have been obvious that a serial killer cannibal would keep his kitchen knives sharpened, but it did all happen so quickly. He felt a camaraderie with Hobbs, as one doesn’t often meet another like himself, but no guilt at killing him. Hobbes knew his story was over, had known that since he had tucked Elise Nichols back in bed.

“See?” Hobbes had hissed, his daughter’s throat open like a smile and pouring blood. “See?”

And Hannibal *had* seen. He had seen and felt, and wondered at a different past, one in which his dear Mischa had been killed by someone who *loved* her. Would he have been able to give her that quick end, had he known what horrors were coming for her, *for them?* He liked to think so, but he also allowed that he was a different beast than he’d started out as.

Removing the needle and wrapping it up, he placed a bandage over the mark and held the glass bottle aloft. The blood looked nearly black in the fire Iight, and he turned the jar back and forth. He hoped a little of his vitality, a little of his life force would be transferred to Will the next morning.

Will awoke in stages; his hearing coming back before anything else.

“Sir, do you live around these parts?”

He let his eyelids flutter, wiping away the dream and letting the cop car in front of him come into view. It felt like hefting large curtains out of the way, and he cleared his throat a few times before his voice would work.

“I-I live in Wolf Trap,” he said, blinking against a sudden flashlight and holding his hand up to his forehead to block it.

“That’s good,” the policeman said. “We’re in Wolf Trap. Have you been drinking?”

Will tried to think back, tried to remember what he had done after his run, but all he could remember was leaving campus.

“I don’t know,” he admitted, voice cracking. “Can I, uh, sit down?”

He was relieved when the cop let him do so in the back of his car, his bare feet were freezing and he was sure he’d picked up a cut or two. He’d have to wait until they were a bit warmer for any real inspection, though.

He gave the officer his information and let slip that he worked at Quantico. That got him an offer of a ride home, after his info checked out. He took it.

The drive home wasn’t far, but it became apparent as they went that Will must have taken a shortcut. There was no way he could have made it on the main road that far on foot. He felt the ankles of his pants to see if he’d gone through the river, but they were dry. All he could hope was that the dogs hadn’t followed him part way and then given up.

“We’ve got a cold snap coming in,” the officer said over his shoulder as they pulled onto the dirt road. “Try this again next week and you might lose a toe.”

Will grumbled out something of an agreement and let his head rest against the window, breath fogging the glass.

“Wasn’t you that caught the Shrike, was it?” the man pressed.

That right there was why he didn't like telling people where he worked. It might have gotten him out of a night in the drunk tank to be working for the FBI, but he had to answer stupid questions from everyone who learned of it.

"No, I just teach," he replied.

"Hmm."

Will let his mind wander a bit after that, and he was glad the man gave up and allowed him some peace and quiet. He was trying not to lose it, but he felt so fractured, the emotional numbness keeping him from outright crying was starting to wear off. He'd at least have to keep it together for another few minutes.

Lights were on in his house and the front door was wide open, almost half of his pack circling around on the front porch. He was thankful that he didn't have to climb through a window. They pulled up and Will went about counting the dogs before dismissing the officer and thanking him for the ride. By the time he got into the tub, hot water stinging his sore feet, it was long after three.

He reached into the pile of work clothes next to the tub and rooted around for what he was looking for, pulling it out and staring at it for a moment before picking up his phone. He typed in the number and sent a quick text, setting his phone down before he could change his mind.

Hannibal's cell phone was sitting in its charging cradle on the bedside table when the text came through. The light sound it made was enough to rouse him, and he sat up against the pillows to check it. He had an agreement with a few of his longtime patients that if they needed help, if it was urgent, they could text him.

It took him a moment to understand that it wasn't a patient, as the text could have been from any of them.

I'm sleepwalking again.

Blood-red

Chapter Summary

Will and Hannibal talk about the sleep walking over breakfast.

Hannibal arranged the food on Will's kitchen counter, the sanguinaccio dolce filling two perfectly emptied pomegranates. Citrus was traditional, but he couldn't pass up the imagery. He surrounded one, and then the other with a smattering of fresh berries, candied lemon rind, and freshly baked lady fingers. He could hear Will and the dogs approaching the back door and added the finishing touches before setting out the coffee.

The back screen slammed open and the pack of dogs rushed inside, veering towards the living room where Will met them with a breakfast of kibble and sausage that Hannibal had brought for them. It was impressive how quickly they settled in and Will was back in the kitchen.

"Dessert for breakfast?" Will asked, pretending to be chipper. He hated asking for help.

Hannibal nodded and stepped out of the way so Will could get a plate. It was thrilling to be so close to Will, to be able to smell him. His scent wavered between fear and arousal, spiking with a heat Hannibal wasn't sure of near his nape. The cramped kitchen allowed for a closeness only rivaled by Will's car, but it also carried more of *Will* ; he was thick in the air.

"This is delicious," Will said, licking his spoon clean as he settled at the kitchen counter on a bar stool.

Hannibal opted to stand opposite, staying where he was in the kitchen. "Something sweet to go along with the coffee. Sanguinaccio Dolce."

"Blood-red Sweet," Will said with a sigh, taking another spoonful into his mouth. "What are you feeling optimistic about?"

"Only the prospect of sharing a meal with you," Hannibal replied smoothly. "Did you know it was common in pre-industrial Italy for children to gather in the street to watch the town butcher render pork?"

Will raised his eyebrows.

"The pig's blood would be mixed, still warm, with milk, sugar and cocoa, and cooked down to a hearty pudding. Man is so split from his instincts today that blood is more often than not off the table. The connotation of blood alone has grown so gruesome that it keeps some up at night," Hannibal continued, scooping up a generous helping and giving a playful smile. "What about you, Will? What keeps you up at night?"

“The only thing that keeps me up at night is my past,” Will said, ruefully. “Sorry about texting you at three in the morning.”

“Three-thirty,” Hannibal replied. “Only an hour away from the time I was planning on rising, I can assure you.”

Will grumbled, picking the blackberries out to eat first, lips staining red.

“Do you remember the dream?” Hannibal asked, pouring them both a second cup of coffee.

Will took the mug from him and shook his head. “Totally blank. I *have* been having these...waking dreams? Not nightmares, I’m used to those. They’re getting, um, darker? Like there’s a blind being lowered. And there’s a new presence.”

There was that sharp tang again, fear. Hannibal leaned in, watching Will’s face intently. “Some things can only be seen in the dark. There are fungi that blend in perfectly to their surroundings as long as the sun is up, but glow with vivid colors as soon as it sets. What can you see now that you could not see before?”

“Something dark,” Will said, visibly shaking.

“Hunting you?” Hannibal asked, leaning in to scent the air between them.

“N-no, embracing me,” Will admitted, arms going tight around himself as if fighting off a chill. “Embracing me.”

Hannibal let the silence stretch out before him long enough to let Will relax, then pushed on.

“Adults don’t usually sleepwalk, but when they do it is often accompanied by an increase in aggression,” he said, voice even enough to suggest neutrality.

Will knew better, and his eyes flew to Hannibal’s shoulder before retreating guiltily to his plate. “About that-“

Hannibal held his hand up to stop him and Will met his gaze long enough to feel the quick shake of his head through his whole body. Apparently they weren’t going to go there.

“There are a few illnesses that cause loss of time and fever,” Hannibal said.

“Fever?” Will asked, confusion writ all over his face.

“I’m sure you’re running a low grade one. Perhaps all week. I suggest you take a day off next week and see a doctor. I could give a recommendation.”

Will’s head was spinning. *It was just one bad night,* he kept telling himself. He felt like he was going to be sick, a cold sweat breaking out on the back of his neck. He allowed Hannibal to soothe him from afar, but only because he couldn’t muster a single word in response.

“It’s best we catch this early, I think.”

Morning Comes

Chapter Summary

> Morning comes to Wolf Trap, and we get to see the Hobbes case from Freddie's point of view.

A dense fog settled around the trees and house as they finished breakfast. The sunlight came in white as it reflected off the fog, illuminating everything as if it was already drowned in snow. Will wasn't sure he wanted to be that exposed, and ached for night to return.

"Morning comes," Hannibal said, apparently aware of Will's feelings, through keen observation or something more otherworldly. "We cannot stop the rising of the sun."

Will grumbled and finished the last ladyfinger on his plate. "Have they got you seeing a psych?" he asked. "Deadly force encounter and all that."

"Yes, an old colleague of mine. He's just as surprised as I am at my predicament," Hannibal agreed.

"Hobbes was going to be caught. The second he tucked that girl back in bed, it was over." Will hesitated before going on. "How is your shoulder?"

"Do you really want to talk about that?" Hannibal asked, feeling as if they were veering a little two close to some truth about the two of them that neither was ready to uncover.

"I didn't, I mean, that wasn't because I'm sick," Will pressed. "If I am sick."

A moment passed between them before he spoke again. He could feel that old anger flaring up, could remember in his bones how it had felt to be lied to in that hallway. He couldn't let it go, no matter how intent Hannibal seemed at pushing it under the rug.

"Beverly is my friend, maybe my only friend," he explained. "She wouldn't have told you anything about me."

"Jack told me about your old injury," Hannibal admitted. "I suppose I wanted to protect him from your anger."

"Yeah, well, you got in the way," Will said, the tightness in his chest growing.

"Tell me more about this presence in your dreams," Hannibal said, attempting redirection. He wanted Will afraid again, wanted that much more for the time being than this anger that was brewing.

Will shook his head and stood, going into the living room to gather the dog's bowls. For a minute Hannibal thought he wouldn't answer, but he was much more comfortable with lapses of silence than the average person, and knew if he let it sit he might get rewarded. He had a feeling most people gave up when Will said no. *What a pity.*

Will slipped behind him and they changed positions, Hannibal going to sit on the bar stool on the other side of the counter as Will turned the water on and started rinsing out the bowls. Steam rose around him from the sink and Hannibal was reminded how lucky he was to be let into Will's inner sanctum. He wondered how many people had been in this kitchen with Will over the years.

"It started changing last week," Will said. The words came, slowly. "I've had the same dream, over and over, since I was a kid. I thought the nightmares would stop once I stopped consulting, but..they just went back to my childhood nightmare."

Will allowed the hot water to burn at his hands as he washed the bowls, the pain helping him speak.

"I'm in the truck with my dad, and we hit a deer," he continued. "Somehow, I end up bent over the deer, bent over it while it's dying. He's pulling me away, pulling me away and I wake."

"This time was different," Hannibal pressed, feeling the fear ebb and flow around Will, watching every blink at the cruelty he was doing to his own hands.

"There was something there, it wasn't my dad anymore," Will explained, hands almost numb with pain under the spray of hot water. "He was…"

Paws on the wood floor, Buster was at Will's feet and Will turned off the water. He dried his hands, wincing as the towel nearly rubbed him raw. He bent to scoop Buster up into his arms, taking a moment to close his eyes and breathe in against the dog's coat. Suffused again with home, he went on.

"My hands were on the deer," he explained. "In its fur. I felt the life leaking out of it."

"And the presence," Hannibal pressed.

"It surrounded me. Where my father pulled me away from the deer, it did the opposite. It surrounded me and kept me there, held me there so I felt it all. The more I have the dream, the deeper my hands sink into its flesh."

"Your father wanted you to turn away in horror," Hannibal guessed. "What do you think he was afraid you would see?"

Will closed his eyes and felt his hands on the deer's chest again, Buster squeaked and he set him down. "Sorry, buddy, sorry little man."

That told Hannibal everything he needed to know; whatever Will's father wanted Will to let go of, his instinct was to grip it. Death, dying, the prospect of seeing that change? Grip.

Freddie Lounds sorted through the photos she'd taken of the Hobbes scene. In a normal case she would have a simple sneak peek of the crime scene and a few paragraphs for the readers depicting said crime. Nothing seemed normal anymore with Hannibal Lecter around.

Her source had let her know when Hannibal was to fly in to meet Jack Crawford in Minnesota. She had a hunch that things were about to go down, and booked herself a hotel room near the airport for a few nights. She'd been told that there was a body, the first body to be found out of the eight that were missing, but she was surprised at how quickly things changed. She thought she would be able to be there when they took the suspect in, and followed a car rented out to Hannibal to the crime scene.

The day had quickly turned from possibly triumphant to disastrous though, and she had watched through a copse of trees as two plainclothes officers led their way into the house, Hannibal calmly walking a few steps behind. She watched him turn in the doorway, narrowly avoiding running straight into the first on-site victim. *The wife.* With her throat slit, blood gushing, she knelt on all fours and collapsed. Freddie was close enough to watch Hannibal stand over the dying woman, hands in his pockets. Although she knew nothing could be done, it still seemed wrong watching someone give no response at all as the woman thrashed and then grew silent. Hannibal's only move had been to tilt his head to the side slightly, his eyes unblinking, black.

She let her mouse hover over a picture of him in the back of the ambulance. He hadn't remained clean and removed for long. After the wife collapsed he had continued into the house and out of the view of Freddie's camera. There were gunshots, more than she had been expecting, and then a silence that seemed to stretch on forever. By the time Hannibal exited the house, the ambulance and a few unmarked sedans were in the driveway and idling. Due to their arrival, she had missed his walk from the house.

He was covered in blood, but no less appealing than in his last full cover photo. The paramedics had cut his shirt back from his shoulder to work on the stab wound there, half his chest bared and glistening with sweat and blood. His left pant leg stuck to his skin, saturated with yet more blood down to his ankle, and one hand rested almost primly in his lap.

He didn't have the look of someone who had just lost a fight, and she assumed he hadn't really. His team lost two people, but the whole of the home team would leave in body bags. He was injured, yes, but seemed almost invigorated.

Sole Survivor.

She made a note of that thought.

The sole survivor of the Minnesota House of Horrors, the Minnesota Cannibal Cabin, no, the Minnesota Shrike's Nest, seemed calm as could be as he was tended to. There was something missing in his eyes, something that she always saw in the aftermath of a bloody fight, and in its absence he barely seemed human.

"What are you trying to hide," she asked the empty room.

Either way, she figured her usual audience wouldn't notice. She was giving them another full photo to sink their teeth into, and going by how many comments she'd racked up with the last one they were hungry for more.

She flipped quickly through the rest of her photos, the antler room taking second seat to the ambulance, and settled in to write the article.

Hannibal Lecter was easier to write about than most, the layers of his personality perfectly defined and shown off in the public arena. He was known for his generous gifts to the local opera house and the Baltimore Museum of Art; the latter even had a hall dedicated to him. He was educated and foreign, making him into the type of bachelor everyone always dreamed of. His grand dinners, though they only came around a few times each year, were mentioned regularly around town, as if mentioning them would make them come faster. The schedule, as far as Freddie could tell, was Hannibal's alone.

He was, all in all, multifaceted. But, as she remembered him standing over the wife's body, she wondered if *even one* of those facets was real.

The campus almost looked like it was from another world, shrouded in fog that hugged the ivy covered buildings like a blanket. Three men worked steadily between the trees, raking the leaves onto tarps to haul them away. Will sat watching them for a while once he'd pulled into his parking space.

He was hesitant to get on with the day, still trying to pick apart the emotions that rose from his and Hannibal's long talk. He wanted more of the man, wanted to be prodded with questions and plied with good food. It occurred to him for the first time that Hannibal might be writing about him somewhere; taking notes on the way his mind worked.

It was a less distasteful prospect than being written about by Frederick Chilton, at least. Hannibal was as hungry for Will's insight as Chilton, but Will thought he would be less likely to publish. He had a gnawing feeling that Hannibal wanted him all to himself; seeing him less as a route to professional success, and more as a way to pass the time. How much longer he would interest Hannibal, he wasn't sure.

You'd be much less interesting without this fever.

He ignored that thought and pulled his wallet out, slipping his medical card from it and flipping it over to look at the 800 number for the tele-health nurse. He hadn't been to a doctor in years. It was just a habit he didn't get into, he supposed. He'd gotten his shots and yearly checkup when he was young, but as he grew older the time between appointments grew exponentially. Whatever the malady, he always managed it with a varying mix of over the counter drugs and time.

He probably should have taken his own temperature while he was still home. They would ask what it was over the phone, he was sure. His breath hitched and he stuck the insurance card back in its slot with his driver's license. He'd call when he was home...if he still felt off.

For now, he had a class to teach.

Are You Alone?

Chapter Summary

Mini chapter: Will remembers the call from the night before and can’t help himself.

“Do as I say.”

The memory washed over Will and he let his eyes close.

“Have you drawn yourself a warm bath?”

He remembered explaining that he was already in the bath.

“I need you to carefully clean both feet. We don’t know what you got into out there, and we don’t want infection taking hold. Are there any cuts? Abrasions?”

Luckily his feet had been fine.

“For now you are safe. Soak as long as you like, and I will be on my way in an hour.”

It had felt like a death sentence; a whole hour.

“And, Will,”

Yes. Anything.

“Don’t go anywhere.”

It was past ten, and something in Will was pacing, something building in him that wanted badly to break out. Maybe it was the whiskey, maybe the fact that he could still *smell* Hannibal in his kitchen. He couldn't turn it off, so he gave in. Texting would sate him, surely. He pulled his phone out of his pocket and tapped out an opening message, not giving it a second thought before sending it. It was the most thrilling thing he’d done in years, he thought.

Are you alone?

It was a difficult thing to toss his phone away, but he didn’t want to risk sending another message before Hannibal had time to respond. It didn’t take long for it to start ringing however, and he was scrambling on his hands and knees to get it back in his hands.

“I believe you’re meant to ask if I’m awake,” Hannibal said, voice warm through the phone receiver.

“You’re way too much of an overachiever to go to bed before midnight,” Will said, feeling a familiar warmth smooth out over his chest.

“I am alone,” Hannibal admitted. “And I am done with work for the night.”

“FBI work...and?” Will asked, letting the last word drag out.

“And I run a private practice. My last patient of the day left at seven. I spent another hour at work taking notes and adjusting patient plans, then came home and had dinner. Dare I ask what you had for dinner?”

Will laughed at that. He’d at least done better than the night before.

“Why, I cooked myself up a little fish dinner, Doc,” Will said, his accent bleeding through, his jaw moving into a more familiar position.

He could hear Hannibal breathe out a laugh, and felt it burst over him, warm and sure.

“I’m glad to hear you are taking better care of yourself,” Hannibal said. “Are you drinking, Will?”

“No more than a gentleman,” Will replied, looking at his glass sideways. “Are you?”

“My second glass of wine.”

Will thought about Hannibal, relaxing in his probably ostentatious home, jacket finally off, shirt unbuttoned at the top button.

“Should you be drinking with those pain meds?” he asked.

“I didn’t take them,” Hannibal replied.

“Abstaining for once?” Will teased. “I guess I didn’t see you as someone who would pass up an opportunity to indulge.”

“I have much better stuff than the ER would prescribe me,” Hannibal said, sounding thrilled at the prospect and going along with whatever Will was getting at. “I can assure you.”

“You could do one better,” Will said, and suddenly he was spinning and not totally in control of his words. “You could show me.”

He said the words, and they felt like another conversation entirely. They felt overtly sexual; dirty and suggestive. His breath caught in his throat and he heard faint crackling in his ears as he desperately listened to find out what kind of territory that line might land them in.

“When the time comes,” Hannibal said, giving nothing away. “For now, tell me why you texted, Will.”

Back on solid ground, then. Why *had* he texted? He couldn't say he was horny, because it wasn't *just* that, and they certainly weren't there yet. There had been some catalyst. He remembered the kitchen.

"It smells like you in my kitchen," the truth just spilled out of him, he couldn't stop it.

"Describe it to me."

"Woodsy, but, uh, more refined? Citrus and something sharp?" Will was almost rambling then. "The second I walked into the room I could smell you, if I closed my eyes it was stronger. Then, I was cooking and I picked up the hand towel and," Will tried.

"And what?" Hannibal pressed, sounding as enthralled as he'd ever been.

"You were right there, over my shoulder." Will breathed it out like a sigh and felt relief as the truth left him.

"I think of you, too," Hannibal replied, "when you are not with me."

It hit Will as hard as a freight train. It was as close to a declaration of love as he could ever hope for.

"I better, I better get to bed," he said, stumbling over his words.

Hannibal's voice was fond as he said his goodbye. "Get some sleep, Will. I'll see you on campus tomorrow for breakfast."

Variety

Chapter Summary

Bedelia coaxes some truths from Hannibal, and the guys meet for late night Thai food.

"I was approached by the FBI," Bedelia said, allowing Hannibal into her office for the first time in weeks. "They want me to do a psych evaluation on you. Are you still working for the FBI Hannibal?"

Hannibal sat in his customary chair, crossing his legs primly. He knew exactly how to get under her skin.

"And what in my *psyche* would preclude me from doing so?" He challenged, face glowing with delight at the prospect of seeing her twist.

She poured each of them a brandy and settled back in her chair before she replied. Her hand was steady as she took a long sip.

"There are certain facets of your personality that don't bend to the same moral infrastructure as the rest of them. I believe you'll enjoy yourself a bit too much."

She raised her eyebrows in emphasis and took another long drink, letting the bloom of warmth in her stomach give her a touch of bravery, false or not. She hadn't pleased him. She could see it in the sudden drop of his brow, the way he just *stopped* looking at her like she was human. She could feel him evaluating her in that way he sometimes did, as if he were weighing her soul.

"I helped solve the Hobbes case," Hannibal declared, flatly.

"You *inserted yourself* into the Hobbes case. Two officers lost their lives."

"I often reflect on what I could have done to change that outcome," Hannibal said, as close to honest as he could get.

"Reflection is only a redeeming quality if you gain insight from the reflection. What you do is closer to admiration," Bedelia replied, voice getting more jittery as she continued to be wholly honest.

"Are you going to test me, or will you continue with these slings and arrows?" Hannibal blustered.

"You are sane, Hannibal. I would say perhaps too sane. You would be so much more human if you had some sort of anxiety."

“Who says I want to be more human?” Hannibal asked, derision pulling at his upper lip.

“There,” Bedelia said, signing a piece of paper and passing it over to Hannibal. “You’ve been rubber stamped. Happy?”

He did look happy, and she settled back in her seat, execution stayed for another night.

The next time Will reached out to Hannibal outside of their morning’s together, the catalyst was a bad day at work and a headache that wouldn’t go away. He texted Hannibal a simple sentence, and seconds later his phone rang, as always.

“I’d hate to impose,” Hannibal began.

Will’s skin felt alive, he would do anything Hannibal wanted, imposition or otherwise. He almost blurted out in the affirmative before Hannibal could finish.

“I’m still at my office. There’s a little Thai restaurant down the street that makes a very good Tom Yum Goong.”

Will was gathering his things and nodding, phone pressed between his ear and his shoulder.

“Why don’t I give you the address, and you stop on the way? We can have dinner,” Hannibal said, voice commanding even over the phone. “Come to me, Will. Your council is dearly needed.”

Will was already starting up his car, aware of the more than an hour drive it would take to get to Hannibal’s home and wondering how much more it would take to get to his office. He must have mumbled something close to a yes and hung up, because he was on his way and waiting for his phone to buzz with the incoming address before he knew it.

The drive there gave him plenty of time to think about what he wanted out of the night, what he should prepare himself for. He was wearing his work clothes, and took a moment to curse himself for not showering before he left. Hannibal smelled like utter sophistication, like power and joy, lightning and a garden in the sun, and he was going to show up smelling of stale sweat and that same old cologne he got for Christmas each year.

He went through the dash and found a half empty packet of cinnamon gum. He chewed it until it didn’t even feel like gum in his mouth anymore, and spit it back into the paper, folding it up and sticking it back with its friends in the dash.

His hunger finally hit him as he was pulling off the highway. He could see the lights of downtown and followed them onto some side streets, listening to his phone’s navigation closely.

By the time he’d picked up the food, Tom Yum Goong and House Pad Thai, along with an order of spicy green papaya salad just because he'd heard someone ordering it, he was feeling like a completely different person. He had a problem he could easily solve, (Hannibal was hungry) and that was enough to have him giddy with purpose.

Some of that elation drained out of his body when he got out of the car at Hannibal's office. The two story house loomed over the pavement, lights on in all the windows, including the two that looked out from the attic. It felt like too many eyes. Will let his own eyes fall to the walkway and forged ahead.

There was a well lit waiting room, and Will suddenly felt underdressed. Hannibal's office was just as expertly detailed as his person, and Will felt all his edges fray. He might look to anyone on the outside like the delivery guy; only positive attributes being the two plastic bags in his hands. He turned away from the door to the inner office and had a sudden impulse to run.

"Will," Hannibal said, just over Will's shoulder.

Will smiled and turned, holding up the food like a fresh catch.

"Perfect," Hannibal said with a pleased little hum. "I'm starving."

Will followed him into a massive main room, an almost perfect balance of slate grey and blood red. He had a hunch blood was a theme for the man, in some sort of ' *gain the power of your enemies'* way or another. He stopped walking halfway into the room, unable to keep his eyes from traveling up long curtains to a second floor open library. He let his eyes follow the trail of gorgeous architecture and impeccable design, spinning on his heel slowly. He had the impression of being in an arena, *down with the lions.*

Hannibal was at his desk, clearing a spot for the food, when Will came back to himself. He walked the few remaining steps and laid the bags down, tearing the knots holding them closed and looking around at the table as he fished for the cutlery.

"Culinary endeavors?" Will asked, eyes stopping on one photo of about thirty mushrooms growing on a clump of something.

Hannibal was around the desk and at his side, leaning just over his shoulder to see where Will was looking.

"If only," he said. "This is the new case from Jack."

Will looked around at the photos again with this new knowledge and spotted a pair of feet and several hands that he hadn't noticed. He groaned. Hannibal chuckled and went to the far wall to grab a second wooden chair. He tucked it next to where Will was standing and went to sit in his own chair on the opposite side.

"I hope it won't ruin your appetite," he said, opening the soup and grabbing a spoon from Will's hand.

"No, it's, it's interesting," Will replied, eyes scanning the photos.

"Less outright gore than usual, at least," Hannibal offered, taking a bite of shrimp and focusing almost completely on the bowl in front of him.

“I’m not put off by the gore,” Will admitted, something about the motives of this case leading him like a golden thread to the truth.

Hannibal made an inquisitive noise.

“I guess I just got bored,” Will admitted. He felt his cheeks go hot with blood as the shame of that sentence stung him.

“Man can adapt to anything. I imagine seeing the same murder perpetrated by the same kind of monster over and over would become monotonous for anyone,” Hannibal replied, the change in Will’s demeanor bringing him back to full attention. “There is beauty in variety.”

Will laughed at that, finally pulled out of his funk, and sat down. He grabbed the Pad Thai and went at it with his fork. “You make it sound like variety is the only thing needed to make the grotesque into art.”

“Do you not see beauty in these photos? Is there not a certain type of divine transmutation going on? Man, rewired from the inside out by our own ancestors?” Hannibal countered, glowing from within.

“Rewired. Is that what this killer is looking for? Connection?” Will asked.

“Perhaps. He’s not far from the rest of us then, is he? Connection is the most essential human instinct. Connection to each other, to ourselves. Connection to God,” Hannibal pressed.

“God?” Will asked, distaste clear in his tone. “Didn’t think you’d be interested in him.”

“God’s terrific,” Hannibal all but gushed. “He brought a tree down on a power line and burned two churches down in the same town last week. Parishioners and all.”

Will felt that itch to run again, but it was tethered to something hot and fresh in his abdomen, and he couldn’t look away now.

“Did God find that beautiful?” Will asked, voice tight.

“Destruction and resurrection go hand in hand. He finds variety *uniquely* beautiful,” Hannibal said, his eyes telling Will something his words yet couldn’t.

I want to hurt you.

Will felt *wild* as that thought drifted into his mind. He quickly filled his mouth with noodles and tried to remember what the hell they were talking about. The case, okay, if he could just think about the case.

“Are they dead when they go into the ground?” he asked.

“No,” Hannibal said. “They are alive upon planting, but unconscious. All but one died in the ground, though.”

“The one that didn’t?” Will asked.

A memory arrived of the last victim reaching out of his earthen cradle to grab onto Hannibal’s left ankle. Hannibal let it pass.

“On the way to the hospital, I’m afraid.”

“Any leads?”

“Not yet,” Hannibal said, sitting up in his chair a bit more and fully taking Will in.

He was gorgeous, red coloring his cheeks and ears, eyes dancing this way and that behind his glasses. Hannibal wanted to pull him out into the night, wanted to cut him chin to groin, and crawl right in.

“That’s enough about me,” he decided aloud. “Tell me about work today.”

Will sighed deeply and smiled. They were back from the ledge, and he was grateful for that.

Two Courses

Chapter Summary

Will has a dream, a real eye opening dream, and Hannibal plans a dinner.

Will knew it was a dream. Something about the way Hannibal's hands wouldn't leave his body, the way they pulled at him, seemed too good to be true. He was pushed down onto the bed and Hannibal was tearing at his clothes. He pulled off his socks with barely enough time before Hannibal was grabbing urgently at his pants and boxers.

Time shifted forward and Will was fully naked, body arching off the bed as Hannibal ran his hands down his sides, fingers pressing painfully into his skin. He heard himself squeal and cry out as Hannibal's lips closed around the exposed skin of his hip and *sucked.*

"Jesus Christ."

Hannibal moved up his body and hovered over him, pressing Will into the bed and breathing in deeply at his neck. It was suffocating in the most amazing way. He felt his cock, hard and eager, pressed between them, and asked for something, *anything.* Hannibal slid back down him, still fully clothed and completely in control, and took Will's prick into his waiting mouth. Will begged his subconscious to not wake, begged his body to enjoy and not flee.

"Hannibal," he breathed out, the word like a prayer on his tongue. "Hannibal, wait-"

Hannibal was sucking him down, choking on him, and it was almost good enough to ignore his hands. Almost.

"Hannibal, wait!"

Wait, not stop. Somewhere, he registered the difference.

Hannibal growled around his cock and his hands were tearing at Will now, instead of his clothes. They gripped either side of his rib cage and Will caught his eye, Hannibal looking up through sweat-drenched hair. Something there was monstrous and it only made Will want *more.* He let out a grunt as he felt those fingers push between his ribs, felt them grow suddenly sharp as they broke through skin. He couldn't breathe, and the arousal that had started the dream was almost drowned out by immense, bright pain. Blood poured out of him in *buckets*, Hannibal's hands leaving deep gashes, pressing further. He saw the bed from above, the blood flowing like water around its legs, rising, *rising*.

"Wait!"

A panic was building in him as he looked away from Hannibal's eyes and to where his hands seemed to be *sinking* into him. He was impaled, could feel the muscle between his ribs give and tear. There was buzzing, high and loud, muffled slightly by the ringing in his ears. *Wait*.

"I want all of you," Hannibal said, or thought, Will wasn't sure.

He woke with a start, hand between his legs and jerking his cock so hard it hurt. He couldn't stop, couldn't seem to control it, and he was coming in no time. It was glorious and painful and he choked out a few sobs before going limp, skin and muscles tingling with effort.

The bedside clock read 3:39. Will swore the numbers were melting off the screen.

When Will woke again it was to the dogs smelling him, trying to wake him for their early morning walk. The sun hadn't risen, but there was a quality to the view out the front window that suggested it wasn't far behind.

He was temporarily disgusted by the dried come covering his left hand and thigh. It'd been years since his body sought relief in the night, and he felt a certain amount of adolescent paranoia as he pulled his undershirt over his head and walked it to the laundry bin in the bathroom. The shock of cold water as he washed his hands didn't help.

Winston was at the door, watching him like he wasn't sure he was allowed to be there.

"Nothing to see," he assured the beast, kneeling with a crack and holding his hands out.

Winston curled into his arms, snuffling against his left armpit and nearly knocking him on his ass. That was all it took to bring Will back into his body and he laughed and buried his face in Winston's fur.

"Okay, okay, okay," he murmured.

The car felt absurdly intimate after the dream Will had. They sat there in the cocooned warmth, breath fogging the windows until Will's peripheral vision felt snow blind. Without even the view of the usual men raking the leaves, Will's mind went searching for scraps.

"Trouble sleeping last night?" Hannibal asked, misinterpreting Will's distraction, or seeming to. He opened the bag in his lap and offered up one of the round storage containers to Will. It was accepted eagerly, along with cutlery. "Tartiflette. A French casserole made with the mainstays of onion, potato, bacon, and cheese."

Will opened the container and marveled at the perfectly browned top, melted cheese crisp only at the edges. He wondered if the Tupperware was oven safe.

"I prefer Reblochon, but any other ripe, washed-rind cheese will do," Hannibal explained, enjoying himself through the food as usual. "Reblochon can't be imported from France, due to the fact that it's made from raw milk. I used a local cheese in its stead."

“I could imagine you owning contraband cheese,” Will admitted, making his usual sounds of enjoyment as he ate. He could see Hannibal in his mind in the back stall of a farmer’s market, consulting with a man about some really good Brie, some illegally cured meats.

“I’d like to have you for dinner,” Hannibal said, opening the coffee and pouring some into Will’s waiting travel mug.

I’d like to have you. Will remembered the dream and had to look away, eyes focusing on the small place right at the bottom of his window that always refused to fog. He must have placed his hand there over a thousand times, pushing the door open and leaving something behind. He felt a sudden rush of paranoia; he thought Hannibal might have been able to *smell* the dream on him, even after he had showered.

“I’m having a few people over next week, Wednesday night,” Hannibal continued, used to Will’s silences. “Nothing fancy.”

Will snorted at that, pulled from his spinning thoughts. “Everything you do is fancy. *Any other washed-rind cheese will do.*”

Hannibal smiled at the gentle teasing. He knew the levels of sophistication he’d developed rubbed Will the wrong way. He wondered briefly if his true form would be more accepted.

“Two courses,” he allowed. “Only a handful of people, most of which you know.”

Will sighed at that and let his head fall back against the headrest, hand covering his face. He weighed the prospect of Hannibal’s company with the discomfort he felt around nearly everyone else. “Who?”

“Alana,” Hannibal replied. “Jack and his wife. Jimmy Price and his partner.”

That caught Will’s attention enough for him to get back to eating, using his finger to get some of the cheese. He didn’t know Price had a partner, and he kind of wanted to meet the mystery man. He mulled it over for a moment, chewing silently until something stuck out in his mind.

“Not inviting Beverly or Zeller,” he said. “Not sure what that tells me about the tenor of the party.”

Hannibal smiled and reached across the seat to brush Will’s hair from his brow. Will melted into the touch, leaning closer and letting his eyelids flutter.

“Always so suspicious,” Hannibal chided, hand slipping to rest on the back of Will’s neck.

“Always,” Will admitted sardonically, a bolt of something intensely appealing rushing through him.

Time slowed and he felt tethered, sinking into his seat. Hannibal’s hand was on him like it had always been there, like it was a part of himself that he dearly missed.

“Beverly is busy,” Hannibal said, rousing Will slightly from his thoughts. “And she mentioned that you don’t like Zeller.”

Will looked over at him pointedly at that, but it didn't ring untrue. Apparently, Beverly's lips were loosening. He wondered if that meant she liked Hannibal.

Hannibal removed his hand from Will's neck and let it rest on the console between them, close but not touching. Will covered the spot on his neck with his own hand, trying to look like he was still debating. It wouldn't do to give in so easily to being social, even if he got to see Hannibal's home for the first time.

"You have time to think it over," Hannibal soothed.

"That sounds like a threat," Will said, air rushing out of his nose as he tried to decipher his feelings.

"When it's a threat, dear Will," Hannibal replied, playfully, "you will know."

The dream washed over Will again and he felt a jab of pain in his side. "As long as it's not the opera."

There was something in Will that was desperate to put some space between them. It wasn't like things were moving too fast, whatever *things* might be, but he felt off balance . Even as the man was trying so clearly to draw Will in, it couldn't be true. He was a side character in everyone's life, he could feel it.

A bit of rough he was trying on.

Always so suspicious.

Will re-evaluated and allowed that someone might want him, maybe just this once. Back in his body, he finally looked at Hannibal over his glasses.

Hannibal smiled at him, both incredibly handsome and unnervingly hungry. "L'Histiore du Soldat is playing next month at The Lyric."

Will made a noncommittal noise in the back of his throat.

"They will unveil a new conductor on opening night," Hannibal continued. "I wonder what I would have to do to have you by my side."

It sounded like a date, but Will didn't allow himself to hope. Instead of letting the warmth he felt in his chest grow, he rolled his eyes. "Little too rich for my tastes, Doctor Lecter."

Ah, Hannibal thought, *back to formalities.*

"Besides, I don't own anything I could wear to it. I hope you don't mind me showing up to your dinner in full Carhartt."

A plan began to form in Hannibal's head. His tailor would have plenty of ideas about how to dress Will, and he had no limit to the amounts he would pay to have Will on his arm in front of everyone. Perhaps the opera would do, after all, as a sort of coming out party.

“Your company is all I require,” Hannibal said, aware of how utterly dishonest that statement was.

“Yeah, well,” Will tried, feeling pulled in two very distinct directions. “I’ll bring a bottle of whatever, whether you only require my company or not. Do you drink whiskey?”

“On special occasions,” Hannibal replied.

“Well, it had better be special if you’re going to drag me out of Wolf Trap on a weeknight,” Will countered, finishing his breakfast and missing the look in Hannibal’s eye.

Hannibal had already started preparing the night in his head.

All Alone

Chapter Summary

Hannibal meets a fan.

Chapter Notes

To the commenter that wanted more psycho Hannibal in their life: sink yer teeth in, babe 🦷🦷🦷

See the end of the chapter for more notes

Hannibal was still running on the excitement of planning a dinner when he received a text from Will later that same week. He would usually call right away, but Jack was at his desk saying something about the mushroom man case they were working on, so he just cradled his phone in his lap and stared at the screen.

I'm in Baltimore. Meet me at your office in an hour?

"I don't usually have trouble keeping your attention," Jack said, still pissed off that they hadn't had a break in the case.

Hannibal smiled and rested his hand on his jacket, ready to leave even before Will texted. "It's incredibly rude of me," he admitted, standing and dusting off his slacks. "I'm afraid a patient of mine is in need of help."

Jack sighed and ran a hand over his face. "We need something on this, Hannibal. You've got to give me something to work with."

Hannibal just smiled tightly and walked out the door. He knew he was possibly the only person allowed to leave without a stern talking to, but he wasn't afraid of Jack. He wasn't afraid, and he was terribly bored; the perfect combination for disobedient behavior.

The second he was in the car he tried to call Will. The phone rang, and rang, an odd feeling settling in his stomach.

Will's eyes fluttered, but wouldn't open. He swallowed and opened his mouth, lips dry.

Is this a dream?

He tried to move, tried to turn his head. A fresh wave of nausea swept over him and everything went dark.

Will's car wasn't on the street. Hannibal had tried calling him several more times before finally giving up. Something wasn't right, and the coiled beast inside him smelled blood.

He pulled his Bentley around the back of the property and walked up the back path, keys tight in his hand. When he reached the back door his jaw clenched and he looked quickly around the bare backyard, empty but for the Japanese maples, naked to the cold wind. Nothing moved, but something was there. He turned the doorknob, and it opened easily, no key needed.

He stepped through the doorway and scented the air as he closed and locked the door behind himself. Will was there, he was sure of it, but he wasn't alone. He let his coat slip from his shoulders and draped it over the back of a chair, his muscles twitching in anticipation. Only a few more steps, through the dark hallway, and he was in his office.

"Doctor Lecter, good to finally meet you. My name is Eldon Stammets, and I'm a fan."

The thin man sat in a cushioned chair, his eyes wild behind the frames of his glasses, but his hand steady on the gun. Instead of pointing it at Hannibal, it was resting over one arm and trained on Will.

"You should have made an appointment," Hannibal said, looking over Will's pliant body, tied to the opposite chair.

Eldon smiled at him, seemingly approving of Hannibal's calm demeanor. "You keep such a tight schedule. Besides, I want you to think of this as a friendly visit."

"Friends don't usually point guns," Hannibal said, walking forward, hand reaching for the edge of his desk.

"Well, I do have to give you a reason to listen," Eldon replied, nodding towards Will.

Hannibal sat at his desk and shuffled the papers there, finding the scalpel he used to sharpen pencils and almost picking it up. He let a moment stretch out between them before he spoke.

"You've drugged him," he said, looking Will over again. He looked almost asleep, if not for the harsh breaths his body was taking. "Care to tell me why?"

The man smiled at that and sat up in his chair; his eagerness would be his downfall.

"I know you're trying to connect with him," he said. "You've tried for months now, with varying success. I have a better way, and I'd like to show it to you."

"A connection that goes deeper than the bonds of friendship?" Hannibal asked, standing again and stalking closer. "You aren't going to bury him."

Hannibal saw the recognition in the man's face and it all broke clear. A chill ran through him and he saw Will for a second as an open wound, his one tender spot, his Achilles' heel. He hadn't let anyone get close enough to become a liability in a long time. Anyone else, and his first instinct would be to take out the weak point. Anyone else would be dead by his hands, before their death could ruin him. He breathed deeply, smelling Will on the air, and felt *ruined.*

"I've been reading about you in TattleCrime. Miss Lounds thinks very highly of you, and your friend." Eldon used the gun almost as a pointer, waving it at Will. "If anyone could understand me, surely it's you. I've seen the way you look at him, like you want *in*."

Hannibal walked closer, face going dark with shadow as he stepped back against the wall, below the lip of the second story.

"I can help you," Eldon continued. "I can plant the two of you, make it so you connect in a way you can't now. Forget feeding breakfast to a broken man, Doctor, you can feed him your life force. When I'm done, you will be *conjoined*."

"I'm afraid you'll find we are already conjoined," Hannibal said, walking the rest of the way to stand behind Will. He rested his hands on the high back of the chair and leaned forward, staring into Eldon's eyes.

The man laughed at that and shook his head. "He doesn't understand you, he's just alone. All alone, just like you."

What happened next burst through the room like a light show. Hannibal tossed Will's chair to the side with savage force, feet shaking the ground as he leapt forward. The gun was pushed upwards by his shoulder, going off in the dark of the room and cutting into the railing above. Hannibal crushed his prey with brute force, all but knocking the life out of the man, low growl rising from his throat.

Will's body was unnervingly easy to move, no more than a sack of potatoes over Hannibal's uninjured shoulder. He was breathing evenly now, and Hannibal was glad for the fact that the drugs used to sedate him were still laid out on a towel on the floor. He lay Will down on the chaise lounge with a grunt, body finally complaining, and went to his locked cabinet to retrieve something to reverse the sedation.

He still hadn't turned the lights on, and the room was growing dark as the sun set outside. He fumbled for the right bottle and a syringe, grabbing a whole sheet of needles and returning to Will.

He was gorgeous laid out like that, and for a split second Hannibal wanted to keep him that way forever, his own sleeping beauty. A sick wave rolled over him as he thought of what Stammets had said. *He doesn't understand you, he's just alone.* He snarled as if he'd been cut and sank to his knees in front of Will.

He's just alone.

Vicious need flooded his system and he let out a strange whine and gripped Will's shirt front. He pulled Will up by it and *shook him,* shook him like a rag doll. When that did nothing to salve his frayed want, he buried his face in the man's chest. He took in heaving breaths against the cheap flannel and leaned in to cover Will's body with his own. He wanted to rend Will limb from limb, wanted to tear him apart for making him feel this way, but settled for opening his shirt and pressing his face to the sweat damp skin of his abdomen. He was so warm there, so vital and alive.

The room grew darker as Hannibal lapped at the exposed skin with the flat of his tongue, driving his nose into Will's belly button and pressing further down. It was less a kiss than some primal call to leave Will smelling like him. He pulled at Will's belt buckle until he was able to get his mouth around a tuft of pubic hair, biting and grinding it between his teeth, sucking and humming at Will's scent.

A deep lassitude came on in starts and fits until he finally collapsed and stilled. He stayed like that, cheek stuck to Will's skin with his own sweat and saliva, until he was able to fashion a plan.

Will was coming back to himself slowly. He felt caught in a thicket of flashing lights and sirens, Hannibal's voice a low hum in the background. He tried to sit up, and swooned with nausea, leaning to the side to retch, nothing coming up. There was a hand on the back of his neck, and someone was talking to him, but he couldn't make out the words.

Sleepwalking. Seizure. Blackout.

"Hannibal?" he asked, eyes finally fluttering open.

Hannibal was there, next to him, cold cloth pressing to Will's brow. Will swallowed thickly and blinked, taking in the office in the dim light cast by the few lit lamps.

"I-" Will tried, searching his memory for a reason he was there. Everything was awash in a grey fog.

"Tell me what you remember," Hannibal all but demanded, looking as put together as ever as Will shivered and shook.

"I was on a run," Will tried, his mind playing back the sound of his own breath in his ears and a dim view of trees. Something was there, just out of sight.

"What do you remember after that?" Hannibal pressed.

It made Will feel more out of sorts that Hannibal was so perfectly in his element. Will was shaking, sweating through his shirt, and he couldn't remember, he couldn't. He looked up at Hannibal and tried to smile, head tipping to the side with a nervous tick, tick, tick.

"Tell me, Will," Hannibal continued, leaning in so Will could feel the warmth of his breath, see the concern etched beautifully on his brow.

“I-I I dunno,” Will admitted, voice going high with desperation as he ached for something to ground him. He wanted to cry at the look Hannibal was giving him, and he could barely choke it back.

“Come sit by the fire,” Hannibal said, standing and offering his arm to Will.

Will allowed himself to be moved from the chaise, leaning into Hannibal as his legs nearly gave way. He was thankful for the low lighting as Hannibal arranged him in a high back chair facing the fire and wrapped a blanket around his shoulders, sure his fear was showing on his face. He scratched at his arm and pulled the blanket back to find a cotton ball taped to his forearm.

“I gave you something for the nausea,” Hannibal explained, showing up again at Will’s elbow, this time with tea. “Drink this, you need the sugar.”

Will eased his eyes closed and took a sip. Hannibal wasn’t joking about the sugar, his mouth twisting at the overwhelming sweetness and grit on his tongue. He drank it down anyway. When he was finished Hannibal took the cup and saucer back and sat across from him, hands clasped in his lap.

“I believe you had another episode,” he explained, looking more than concerned.

Will felt guilt swell up in him and cleared his throat. It hurt. “Episode?”

“Your illness is progressing, I’m afraid. You asked to meet you here, do you remember that?” Hannibal’s eyes searched Will’s face, falling away sharply when Will shook his head. “When I arrived you were on the back stoop, nearly frozen to death.”

Will’s head continued to shake. He didn’t remember asking Hannibal anything, didn’t remember talking to him after their usual breakfast. He had no idea how he’d ended up there at all, and he was worried that the black hole of lost time would eat him up.

“I’m worried about you,” Hannibal said, voice so full of emotion that Will was shaking again. “You’ve lost time twice in as many weeks. I think it’s best if you spend tonight in my guest bedroom, we’ll call someone to check in on the dogs. We can’t have you wandering off like this at night.”

“I’m not,” Will tried, “I’m not sure what’s wrong with me.”

The admission broke free of him violently and he found himself sobbing, clutching to the blanket around his shoulders for dear life. Hannibal surrounded him, hands smoothing down his back, and Will let himself cry into Hannibal’s shoulder.

“Shh,” Hannibal cooed. “I have you. I have you, Will.”

Chapter End Notes

Do you ever look at some dude you met a couple months ago and feel completely ruined!?! 👅

Stay

Chapter Summary

Will gets to see Hannibal's house for the first time, and Hannibal looks after the dogs.

Once Will was tucked into the passenger side of Hannibal's car, shoulders still wrapped in a blanket, his mind started to come back on board. He realized he didn't have his phone, and worried out loud that he didn't have his neighbor's phone number and couldn't call him to check on the dogs.

"Once I have you clean and in bed," Hannibal assured him, "I will look in on them myself."

"It's an hour drive," Will complained, voice still weak from his dry throat.

"Are you more concerned about what you might do in that hour," Hannibal asked, "or how you might repay me?"

Will sighed and ran a hand over his face. Hannibal was right. He nodded and looked out the window. "The latter."

Hannibal finally caught sight of Will's car around the corner from his office, and pulled up next to it, slipping the car into neutral. "Do you have your car keys?"

Will's hands flew to his pockets, relieved that his keys were there. He pulled them out and dropped them into Hannibal's waiting hand.

"Perhaps we'll find your phone after all," Hannibal sighed, leaning in close to Will for a second after he opened his door and removed his seatbelt. "If we don't...you must remember that friendship doesn't have to be transactional, Will. You can allow me to care for you, as I wish to."

And what a fucking sentence to leave Will with. He shivered as the air from outside the car made it in, pulling the blanket more closely around his shoulders. He tried to think of the last time he'd let someone care for him, someone besides his father, and he clutched at straws. It pulled another deep sob from him and he hid his face, breathing into his hands until Hannibal joined him in the car again.

"No phone, I'm afraid," Hannibal said. "At least we know how you got here."

Will hummed and let his hands fall away, looking out the window again. He counted streetlights as they made their way out of the small neighborhood and larger business district. It helped him calm down to take in the changing landscape. He never had the chance to be the

passenger, and as they drew into another neighborhood after ten or so minutes on a thoroughfare he took in the different houses with intent, sure he could pick Hannibal's out.

Hannibal's home ended up being a close cousin to his office, the three sets of street facing windows only really differing in *style.* Will smiled to himself as it struck him that they looked like they had eyebrows. The lights were either on timers, or Hannibal didn't fear the electrical bill any more than anything else. Where the office had seemed overly clinical from the street, Will felt pulled in by Hannibal's home. Maybe he was just tired.

Hannibal parked them in a spot behind the house, away from the prying eyes of the street, and the car quieted and turned off.

"Are you able to walk?"

The words broke through the comfortable silence that had settled around them and Will winced as he opened the door and tried his legs. Getting out of the car seemed answer enough, and soon they were standing under a pointed overhang that matched the front of the house, and entering into a dimly lit coat room. Hannibal settled Will in front of a massive fireplace just inside, hands on his shoulders to get him to sit, and knelt to light it. It was just like him to have firewood already arranged perfectly on the grate in the firebox. As Will's eyes adjusted and the fire took, he noticed the whole of the back wall of the coat room was covered in perfectly stacked wood. It made him ache for his dogs, wondering if he left the space heater on for them.

"Stay," Hannibal said, hand resting on Will's shoulder for a moment.

Will acquiesced with a grunt, sinking into the sofa as Hannibal could be heard taking the stairs. There were a few sconces lit on the walls around him, and Will felt something creep over him as he noticed how many empty eye sockets looked on. There were animal skulls covering almost every surface, hanging from the walls with their imposing antlers and horns. He had a flashback to the woods, his breath harsh in his ears, the birch trees surrounding him affording no privacy. *There were eyes on him,* he still felt them. He tried to remember more, but grew weak at the effort. It wasn't as blank as before, but the landscape of his mind seemed tangled and obscured. He ripped off the cotton ball on his arm just to feel something.

He wasn't left alone for long, thankfully, and Hannibal was back at his side with a stack of impossibly plush towels and what he assumed were to be his sleeping clothes.

"A bath is waiting upstairs," Hannibal said, face flickering from handsome to haunting in the firelight. "Once I've shown you where you'll sleep, I'll tend to your pack."

Will let the Christmastime scents of cinnamon, clove and pine take over his senses as he followed Hannibal through a hall and up the stairs. He was glad to find the guest room was a soothing mix of grays and greens, and less tightly decorated with reminders of his own mortality than the rest of the house. The ensuite was at the far end of the room, almost the whole of one wall opening up to it, and a claw foot tub was waiting with steam rising from it as it filled. Will let himself be drawn in by that warmth and went to run his hand under the tap.

“I could use a bath,” he admitted, voice tight. “And I might just burn these clothes.”

Hannibal set the tower of towels at his side and rested his hand between Will’s shoulder blades. It was a new habit, these confident touches, and Will was almost distraught with how good they felt.

“The kitchen is easy enough to find,” Hannibal said, voice low as if the moment could stand more intimacy. “You’ll find an assortment of cheeses and meat on a tray on the middle shelf of the fridge. Feel free to eat anything you like.”

Will huffed out a small laugh and leaned back into Hannibal’s touch. “You might regret saying that,” he admitted. “Pretty sure I could eat a horse.”

He waited for a response, but none came. They stood there awkwardly, sharing the same breath, before Will finally broke away, turning and crossing his arms.

“I won’t be long,” Hannibal assured him.

“Thank you,” Will murmured, eyes back on the ground.

Hannibal had a fondness for dogs. He’d had to learn how to speak to them years ago, their nature keeping them in close proximity to many of his victims. They had a weakness for meat, a meat tooth, just like him, and as he opened Will’s front door he pulled a bag of dried beef from his pocket in greeting.

It helped that he’d met them before, but he knew he could easily make his way past them even if he hadn’t. They swayed around him, easy friendship offered on every panting breath, and he let his left hand make its way into warm fur as he passed around the meat. A medium sized dog, possibly named Winston, was the only one to sit. He stared up at Hannibal with questioning eyes and Hannibal felt Will’s presence for a brief moment.

“Good boy,” he said, handing over a sizable chunk of meat. “Good boy.”

When they finally parted, letting him walk in, he left them behind and went to the bathroom off the front room. He looked everywhere for signs of a struggle, but Will must have been taken from the porch as he’d first suspected. Will’s world was intact and comfortable here without him, running shorts discarded next to the shower. Hannibal paused to run his hand over the edge of the laundry basket, bits of wicker grabbing at his gloves.

Though he was tempted to stay in Will’s home, to linger and steep in the stark, simple manner of his life, he had a body to take care of, and it wouldn’t do to let it sit in his office basement for long.

“Who’s hungry?” he asked, alerting the dogs and going to the closet he had seen Will retrieve the dry food from.

Will let his head dip below the covers, eyes closed against the warmth, and held his breath. He felt small in the huge guest bed, fractured. He finally let out his breath, hard and heaving, and settled. It was easier to be under the covers completely than to look around at the room, with it's perfectly tailored curtains and curated wildlife paintings. It felt like a Twilight Zone version of his own home.

Eventually, the air was too hot and he had to pull the sheets down. He stared up at the painting across from the bed, a coyote peeking out from behind a swell of golden foliage. He recalled a story he'd read about coyotes and badgers hunting together on the prairie in Colorado, and wondered which of the two animals he was closer to. Coyotes tended to be gregarious and solitary, a strange mix that made Will think of Hannibal. Though the house he kept was gorgeous and well looked after, Will had yet to see the touch of anyone other than Hannibal in this place. He couldn't recall seeing a single photograph.

Hannibal had acquaintances, the pages of TattleCrime had enough pictures of him in a crowd to assure Will of that, but he felt himself noticing a striking lack of close friends in Hannibal's life. Even the proposed dinner party was a mashup of old colleagues and new, save for himself. Maybe Hannibal hadn't *quite* been lying when he'd first told Will he wasn't social. Will was tempted to warm his relationship with Alana for the sole purpose of looking into Hannibal's life a little closer. He knew something was there that he wasn't meant to see.

"Does that make me the badger?" he asked the empty home.

There was no denying they made an odd couple, and the oddness only seemed to grow in stature the more Will got to see. It wasn't some difference in sophistication, Will thought. He could keep up with Hannibal no matter how obscure his tangents went. Perhaps it was a difference in approach. Hannibal seemed to view the world as one great playground, always looking forward to the unfolding of days. To Will, it was more of a prison. Each day brought with it another slog through the same old hell, the moments he felt truly at peace spread out like breadcrumbs in front of him, growing steadily farther apart.

He needed to get back in the river, that was all there was to it. He had only been fishing a handful of times in the last few months. He'd looked forward to more time off when he'd quit after the digger case, but he found himself doing less and less of the things he loved as the winter months drew close. He was spending too much time in the past.

With that settled in his mind, and Hannibal still off in the great wide world, Will let his eyes close and summoned sleep. *Oh, let her be a kind mistress,* he thought.

Run

Chapter Summary

Morning in Lecter Castle, as it were.

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes

Will was back in the woods, in the thicket of birch trees between his house and the stand-alone garage where he kept his boat. He was running, he was running but something was *wrong.* The trees flashed past, *yellow white yellow*, seeming to spin around him as if he'd lost all directionality, a carousel mocking him as he desperately *ran.*

What are you running from?

Why aren't you wearing your running shoes?

What is that sound?

Crack! The sound issued from over Will's shoulder and he stumbled to his knees, hands going to the back of his head. Why? *Why?*

The white trunks of the trees seemed to flow on forever into the sky, reaching higher and higher as Will's brain went a bit fuzzy. He let his head fall back, time shifting with another loud *crack!* The sudden darkness of night pulled the breath from his chest. It was only then that he realized it was a dream. He shivered at the sudden drop in temperature, nearly falling to his hands and knees in shock as he gazed up at a crescent moon.

There was *someone coming* , Will felt it as before, but there was also something else. Someone was beside him. Crack! He couldn't turn, couldn't fall out of *formation,* but he could shift his gaze. Crack! He let his eyes roll to the side and felt a fresh wave of terror.

The man made of flies knelt next to him, arms over his head, if you could call it that. His borders swayed as the thousands of horse flies worked to keep him solid. Will smelled something flammable, maybe gasoline, and *meat.* He choked on the scent and gagged, heaving as nothing came up.

He woke, legs over the edge of the bed and hacking with enough force to make the air wheeze out of his chest like a death call. He was covered in sweat and shaking like his nervous system was sending out an alarm. Something was *wrong,* something from the dream had followed him home.

A miniature version of Will's body was shaking on a small black-and-white screen after he had suddenly jumped from a sleeping position. It was enough for the video to start recording, and the audio to click on. Will's panting came through tinny on the built-in speakers below the screen and Hannibal was up in seconds, rolling over and pulling the monitor into his hands. He struggled to focus his eyes, to wake up completely, turning the volume knob down as Will started to make more noise.

"What? What? No no no, please."

Hannibal had to check a second time to make sure it was recording. His hands nearly shook as he turned the volume back up just a bit to hear more. He'd always wondered what Will said to himself when no one was around, and bar surveilling Will's home, it was probably the last time he'd be able to answer that question for quite a while. It would be important, he thought, to go over the video at a later time, a time when his brain wasn't so bogged down by his body.

A pained moan came through the speaker and Hannibal warred with the duel instincts to interfere with Will's unhappy awakening, and to reach into his pajama pants and relieve some pressure. He was rarely put in a position so perfectly aligned to his proclivities outside of his own doing and the shock of arousal was almost too much to ignore.

There were whimpers and curses coming through then, and Will was making his way to the en-suite on the screen. Hannibal hoped he wouldn't be out of frame for long. He checked his watch, holding his wrist up to the light of the monitor's screen. It was half past four in the morning, which meant he'd only slept a few hours since getting back home. He did well on four hours, but he knew he wouldn't be able to get back to sleep now if he tried, so he got out of bed and went to his wardrobe. Will came back into frame on the monitor in his hand, and Hannibal turned it off and pulled a sweater over his head.

Will shook and cursed as he walked away from the bed. The nightmare was still rolling over him in waves, daring to pull him under at any moment, but he really had to piss. The toilet was in a smaller room off to the side of the large tub, and Will was relieved to find a fresh toothbrush, floss, and a miniature tube of toothpaste next to the sink. A little bit of routine would help him get over the dream, and his mouth tasted rank. *And* , his clothes were there, apparently laundered and folded overnight. He wondered absently when Hannibal had been into his room, and how he had slept through it.

He relieved himself and washed his hands before pulling the toothbrush free of its cellophane wrapper and squeezing out too much toothpaste from the little tube. He cursed and rinsed the excess down the drain before brushing, letting the familiar routine ground him.

He was awake, he was safe, and the only thing in that house with him was Hannibal Lecter, whom he found himself trusting with his life, of late. The dream, no matter how distressing, couldn't hurt him.

Suddenly freezing, his sweat cooling and borrowed shirt sticking to his skin uncomfortably, he figured a shower would do as well.

Hannibal was in the kitchen early, it seemed, the sounds of him cooking drawing Will down the stairs after his shower. There was music coming from some built in system on the ground floor, giving the impression of a high end cooking show as Will rounded the corner into the huge kitchen. It had seemed achingly sterile the night before, Will feeling like he'd be caught by an orderly when he went to get something out of the fridge, but it was much warmer with Hannibal in the middle of it. His usual suit was gone in favor of a bright red sweater and drawstring pants. Will paused in the doorway, unsure whether he was welcome, and still feeling out of sorts.

Hannibal hummed along with the music as he cut up some greens, a pan at his left hand on medium heat and steaming like it had been working for a while. His hair was soft over his brow, light from the oven hood catching it and reminding Will of sunlight in Hannibal's eyelashes. He looked unfairly handsome, as though something rough had been peeled back, and it must have drawn a noise from Will, as he glanced up in recognition.

"Good morning," Will said, voice coming out rough.

Hannibal smiled at him, looking Will up and down before nodding to the counter where freshly brewed coffee was waiting. Will almost stayed where he was, the perfect bubble of the kitchen feeling suddenly farther away than just a few steps. It was easier to enter when Hannibal went back to cooking.

"I hope you slept well," Hannibal said, pulling an egg from the fridge and cracking it over the pan with one hand.

"Better than most nights," Will lied, pouring himself a cup of coffee and leaning against the counter.

Hannibal looked pleased with that, and his indulgent smile made Will finally calm. Will found, more and more, that he knew how to feel around a pleased Hannibal. It felt safe to please the man. He tried no to think about what that said about him.

"After breakfast we'll get you to your car," Hannibal said, looking up as he cooked to watch Will move around him. "You can get home to your pack before the school day. I'm sure they have missed you."

"Thank you," Will murmured in relief, finally feeling safe and sound.

Chapter End Notes

Is it getting hotter in here... or is it just me (feelin like the frog in the pot, babeyyyyy)

The Gift

Chapter Summary

> The day of Hannibal's dinner party arrives, and Will can't stop thinking about a special someone.

It was the morning of Hannibal's dinner party and he was in his kitchen prepping at around five when he received a text from Will's new phone number. He picked up his phone and read the text, not sure if he was meant to call.

See you before classes?

Will wasn't the sort of man to ask for reassurances. In fact, he was *wary* of reassurances. Hannibal could only hope that Will was doing so now because he'd found out about the gift. He swallowed and typed out a quick reply, not a moment to waste on such an important day. The fresh anticipation bolstered him, and he hummed along with the music playing as he got everything back into the fridge.

Will wasn't in his car when Hannibal arrived, and it took him a minute to find the man. He was pacing, nearly electric, between two trees at the far edge of the parking lot. Hannibal left the safety of his car, bringing the bagged breakfast and coffee along with him as he went to join the man.

Will grinned at him wildly as he walked closer, cheeks and nose red from the chill, before schooling his expression a bit. It woke something up in Hannibal, something that he'd only just become aware of, and he sidled up to the man so they wouldn't have to share too much eye contact. He wanted Will's opinion unvarnished by whatever he might pick up from him.

"You're out of your car," he noted, opening the thermos and pouring coffee into the lid.

"I'm out of my mind!" Will replied, laughing a bit feverishly as he rubbed his hands together against the cold, grin going wide again. "Sorry, sorry. I mean good morning, of course."

"Better morning than usual," Hannibal observed. "I'm not a vain enough man to think this burst of energy is in relation to dinner tonight."

"Dinner," Will said, eyes going wide for a second. "Shit, no. Sorry."

Hannibal handed over a bagel with cream cheese and lox to Will and eyed Will's energetic frame. "You're full of apologies, but no information. I'm beginning to wonder at the effort that must take."

He could see Will stop himself from apologizing once more and smiled into his coffee.

“I don’t know, I’m not sure I’m meant to tell anyone. I mean, I *mean,* I know it’s all you’re going to focus on at work today, and you’ll find out as soon as you go in, but it all just happened so fast, and Beverly was sending me photos and-“ Will went on, eating as voraciously as he was talking. The words were falling from him at a faster pace than Hannibal had ever seen.

When the words came to nothing Hannibal rested a hand on Will’s elbow and finally turned to look him in the eye. He felt a pang of something at how visibly the touch calmed Will.

“What is it?” he asked, leaning in so the fog of his breath mingled with Will’s.

Will’s brows furrowed and he smiled again, almost whisfully, before nearly whispering the truth. “He’s back. It’s the Ripper.”

Hannibal hid his mouth behind the lid to his thermos and made a sound he hoped would keep Will going. He took a sip of coffee and tried to feel his way back to outer neutrality.

“A body was found in the overgrown lot across the way. It was tied to a tree! A ten foot maple, just, just *left* in the lot,” Will gushed, eyes flitting attentively over Hannibal’s face. “I have no idea how he got it there without anyone catching it on camera! A body, across from the entrance to Quantico!”

“How do you know it’s the Ripper?” Hannibal pressed, the warmth of Will’s excited manner filling him to his brim. He worried he might choke on it all.

Will sighed out a small laugh and gave Hannibal a look he hadn’t seen before. This, Hannibal realized, was what Will Graham looked like when he was *sure of himself.* The fact that he’d done this for Will, and Will was taking so well to the offer was *earthshaking.* He’d expected interest, not this unfettered joy.

“Oh,” Will said, licking his lips and growing more serious, “I know it’s him. He’s playing our song.”

Hannibal had to stop himself from dropping the coffee and pressing Will against the nearest flat surface. His breathing was growing rough and he tried to get ahold of himself.

“What gave it away?” he gasped, eyes on Will’s lips.

Will looked up, searching his own thoughts, and shifted into educator mode. He rattled off a long list of the Ripper’s most prominent kills, highlighting where this new one fit in the scheme of things. With mention of surgical trophies and sadistic behavior, Hannibal soaked in the burning heat that was the knowledge that Will’s mind was *painted* in his own work. The more Will explained, the more it was obvious he was *enthralled* by the Ripper.

Something may have been a little too indulgent in Hannibal’s face, because Will was quickly fighting himself and trying to explain away his exuberance. “It’s been almost a year since

he's killed. I don't mean to sound like...it's just very exciting to get in on the ground floor on this one."

Hannibal hummed and tried to keep his balance, feeling that he would soon be pulled entirely into Will. *Entirely.*

The school day passed with an electric hum running through the entire campus, like they were hooked up to a live wire. Will swore he'd never experienced that level of incessant chatter in the halls in the whole of the time he'd worked there.

It's Christmas, he thought crudely as he packed his things into his car and headed home to check in on the dogs and shower for the party.

The sounds of bells seemed to follow him everywhere and he allowed himself to lean into the feeling of childlike anticipation. Everything was looking up. He'd slept fine for more than four nights in a row, there was a new body in the Ripper case, and he was going to be gorged on something amazing from Hannibal's kitchen.

After he'd settled the dogs out and taken a shower, he went to the upstairs closet and slipped into his best pair of wool dress slacks, a dark gray shirt, and his one and only black knit sweater. He knew he'd be covered in hair by the time he got to the car, but it could be easily removed. He smiled as he thought of seeing what Hannibal had picked out to wear. That alone would tell him how far off the dress code he was, but either way he thought the man wouldn't mind him leaving his one good blazer at home. Variety, and all that.

He wanted to get there early, before anyone else had tainted Hannibal with their presence. He felt refreshingly open with himself about that want. He'd never been a very possessive man, but he felt it growing out of his chest *like another limb,* this need to have Hannibal to himself. He wanted every person at the party to feel like they were near intruding in his and Hannibal's business.

It passed through his mind that it was dangerous to try to stake a claim before either of them had even begun to talk about what they meant to each other. He told that though to fuck off and reassured himself that he was wanted . He pulled into the drive and parked right next to the Bentley, in the only other off street space. *Stake,* he thought, *claimed.*

Hannibal came to the back door drying his hands on a towel and looking for all the world like a dream housewife. Will felt fondness bloom in his chest at the way Hannibal smiled and ushered him in; not like he was intruding, but like he was *home.*

"I'm so glad you're here early," Hannibal chirped, taking Will's coat from him and wrapping his arm around Will's waist lightly to direct him to the kitchen.

The room was transformed, so completely different from the only other times Will had seen it. He understood why there was a stainless steel cart in it, now, as every available surface was covered in some form of gorgeously plated item. Small glass domes covered petit fours and handcrafted chocolates, trays of perfectly sized hors d'oeuvres lined the counter along the right wall, and the stove was bubbling away with at least four different dishes.

Hannibal came to him, a wooden spoon of risotto steaming in his raised hand, and pressed the edge of it smoothly to Will's lips. Will felt a shock at Hannibal's fingers at his chin, but he was tasting the most amazing thing he'd ever tasted so he just closed his eyes and angled to get more. Hannibal hummed appreciatively and brought the spoon away before long. His thumb ran across Will's lower lip and it felt *lewd.* It would have been perfectly natural to take Hannibal's thumb right into his mouth, run his teeth across the pad and curl his tongue around him, but thankfully Hannibal had a dinner to serve.

"Mushroom risotto," Hannibal said, walking back to the stove and leaving Will *bereft.*

"Delicious," Will replied.

For a good thirty minutes he forgot completely that the world existed, tied up in tasting and learning about all the things Hannibal was going to serve. Their perfect companionship came to an end, at last, when Hannibal had to go upstairs and change into his proper host attire, and Will was left walking around the ground floor with a mostly full glass of wine. It was good wine, he just hadn't eaten a big lunch and he wanted to pace himself. He was glad for that when the doorbell rang.

Alana Bloom was stunning, and stunned. She made a strange little croak and her eyes flew wide when Will opened the door instead of Hannibal. She was holding out a bottle of wine, and just froze there for a second. In the meantime Hannibal had descended the stairs and was at Will's back fast enough to save them all some embarrassment.

"Alana, don't you look gorgeous," he said, ducking around Will to take the bottle of wine from her hands. "And this will pair well with dessert. Please, come in."

Will allowed Hannibal to corral the both of them into the dining room, as long as he kept his hand steady on Will's lower back. When he pulled away to open another bottle of wine, Will felt stupidly adrift. It wasn't like he didn't know Alana, he could do small talk.

"How are you?" he asked her, finally happy for the wine in his hand.

Alana laughed a bit as Hannibal excused himself to the kitchen, swallowing hard and trying to find the words. "I'm fine. You two seem comfortable."

Will smiled, inwardly thrilled to have someone else's view of them revealed. "You know Hannibal," he offered plainly. "He's the perfect host."

The doorbell rang, and Will was happy for the distraction of others arriving. He took a gulp of wine and fell back into the shadows a bit as he heard people being greeted. He only smiled as Alana seemed to weigh him with her eyes. *Nothing's gonna fall out of my pockets,* he thought, *shake away.*

Bouquet

Chapter Summary

DINNER PARTY

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes

Jimmy Price's husband was fantastic. His name was Ralph, and he was an entomologist at some local lab. When he told Will he'd actually read Will's Standard Monograph on Determining Time of Death by Insect Activity, it was enough for them to break from the group and form a sort of bug club. They spoke about specimen jars and preferred hand nets (Ralph swore by the Ranger butterfly net) in hushed tones in a corner while Hannibal plied them with mulled wine and an array of hors d'oeuvres. It lasted, Will thought, for at least an hour before they were pulled apart and sat at the table.

Once everyone was seated, it took less than ten minutes for conversation to turn from the food to the case. *The* case.

"Please don't let him get his bag out," Ralph joked, leaning against Bella, Jack's wife, for sympathy. "He brought photos."

"I *took* those photos," Jimmy said, wine drunk and looking more relaxed than Will had ever seen.

Alana looked between Will and Jimmy nervously, unable to stop herself from playing mother. "Are you sure we should be interrupting this wonderful dinner with a body?" she asked, looking for backup from Bella first, then Hannibal.

Unperturbed, Bella simply waved her hand in dismissal and allowed Jack to feed her a bite of food from his plate, ever attentive. Will was only just seeing this side of Jack, and it warmed him to the man, made his rough edges make sense. Everything must be angering when you're constantly pulled away from a love so engrossing, faced with the knowledge of the danger of *their* world.

Will's attention was drawn back to Jimmy when he finally managed to unzip his bag. He pulled a small stack of photos and a well worn notebook out and smiled up at the room. He was about to infodump on them, and Will was happy to buckle in for the ride.

"First thing I'll say to that," Jimmy said, directing the comment to Alana, "is that it isn't a *body.* It's a bouquet."

The room's attention was so tight on Jimmy that everyone missed the way Hannibal nearly choked on his wine, a bit of it going up his nose and stinging. *Mouths of babes,* he thought.

"May I?" Jimmy asked the group, indulgently. There were enough murmurs of agreement that he took a deep breath and began.

"The victim was bent backwards, hands attached to feet, around the trunk of a felled maple. I say felled, but the roots of the tree were still attached, suggesting it was plucked from the ground by a giant."

The playful nature of his diatribe had the whole of the room settling in comfortably to listen, Alana excluded.

"The chest and abdomen were peeled open and used as fertile planting grounds for a lush woodland tapestry," Jimmy continued. "Around the flanks, elm oysters, morels, and wine cap mushrooms joined three different types of mosses and several ferns. Furthest out is the Autumn fern, *cultivar brilliance* meaning the fronds are bright red, the Cinnamon fern, with its scattered tufts of red fibers surrounding the base of each frond, and finally the Christmas fern, with its classic green foliage."

A handful of photos were passed around, close up photos of lush ferns and glossy mushrooms.

"There is a theme of red, you can see, and as we go further in, it intensifies," Jimmy explained. "First we have Dicentra Formosa, the bleeding heart plant. It's fern-like leaves are included with the inflorescence of drooping red and fuschia flowers, the shape of which give it its name, and our first hint at the romance going on in this piece."

"Secondly we have Coral Bells, Heuchera Glabara, with their spikes of tall bell-shaped blooms in, yes, red. They've been used by the native peoples of the Americas for years as a pain reliever, and a treatment for inflamed testicles due to syphilis."

A couple of small laughs came from around the table, and Jimmy nodded, pleased.

"Thirdly we have the Jack-in-the-pulpit. Earlier in the year, you would be able to see why they call it that, as it's tall stalk or spadix is hidden inside a hooded cup. It resembles a secretive little man. This late in the season, though, the spathe falls off to reveal decorative wands of bright red berries."

More photos were passed around the table, moving with reverence from hand to hand. Something about it felt to Will like a seance.

"I think the significance here has less to do with the fact that you can get blisters from eating the root raw, and more to do with the years it takes for even one of these flowers to bloom. Our killer either has his own property with a woodland, or has seriously diminished some poor animals' food stores for the winter."

"And lastly," Jimmy continued, "we have Aquilegia Canadensis, the Eastern Red Columbine. Its little red and yellow jester hats hang from delicate red stalks, and change shape as they

open. Individual plants can be short-lived, but they self sow freely, which means they can form large drifts of color, blanketing the ground in red pools at the edges of the woodland."

"Who is the bouquet for?" Bella asked, leaning in to listen more carefully as Jack rubbed her back in small circles. "Surely not our victim."

"No," Jimmy said, with a small laugh. "His genitals were removed while he was still alive, and stuffed into his mouth along with about forty-five Columbine Duskwings. Moths, chest full of flowers and a mouthful of butterflies. Our poor chap is more of a canvas than a participating party."

"Erynnis Lucilius," Will exclaimed, eyes going straight to Ralph in excitement. "They have scent scales! Little yellow spots on the male's costal folds."

"They live off the nectar of the Eastern Red Columbine," Jimmy explained.

"Who is the bouquet for?" Hannibal pressed, speaking for the first time in a while.

Will's eyes went to him, picking up something almost imperceptible passing over Hannibal's face.

"I think our Ripper-" Jimmy started.

"If it's the Ripper," Jack interjected.

"It's him," Will said, looking back to Hannibal and nodding. Something in him wanted Hannibal to know he was right, that his perception wasn't off.

"The Chesapeake Ripper is in love," Jimmy proclaimed.

"Strange math," Hannibal noted, "with a monster in love. I wonder what might come of this love interest, were they to have the scales removed from their eyes."

"Do you think they know the Ripper," Will asked, mind spinning with the thought.

"You said that something changed," Hannibal replied, and suddenly it felt like they were the only two people in the room. "Perhaps someone walked into the Ripper's life."

"Someone interesting enough to catch the eye of one of our most unknown killers?" Jimmy asked, breaking the bubble.

"Unknown," Hannibal agreed, holding his wine glass up to the light, "but perhaps not completely unknowable."

The party started to wind down around eleven, everyone but Will and Hannibal letting themselves sober up over dessert. Bella and Jack left first, followed shortly by Jimmy and Ralph.

“We need to get coffee,” Will said, putting his number into Ralph’s phone as Jimmy brought the car around. “I have so many things to tell you about the insect life by my river.” Will blushed, full of wine and the surprise of a new friend. “The river by my house, not *my* river.”

“I’ll bring my Ranger,” Ralph agreed, taking his phone back and slipping it into his pocket.

Jimmy honked the horn, a quick succession of taps, and Ralph nodded and left. Will stood in the doorway for a while watching them go before he got up the courage to walk back into the sitting room. Alana was still there, and he desperately wanted to get her to leave.

Hannibal rose when Will walked through the doorway, bringing the bottle of whiskey they’d been working on to him and filling his glass. His fingers brushed against Will’s as he steadied the glass, and their eyes met. Hannibal breathed in slowly and let the contact last.

“I’m terribly sorry if it’s rude,” Hannibal said, his comment meant for Alana, “but I’m afraid I must say my goodbyes and work on cleaning up.”

There was something in the way he left his hand touching Will’s, something about how his eyes didn’t stray to Alana over his shoulder, that let Will know he was meant to disregard the statement. Will was meant to *stay.* When he finally stepped away, Will sipped at his drink and looked pointedly at the fireplace.

“Oh, no, no, that’s fine,” Alana said, getting up and brushing off her skirt. “I have some work to settle before I get to sleep, anyways. Wonderful dinner, Hannibal. As always.”

Hannibal was a gracious host and peppered her with apologies and compliments as he ushered her to the door and helped her into her coat. Will, on the other hand, simply lurked a few steps behind Hannibal, sipping his whiskey slowly and keeping his mouth shut. He couldn’t have looked more possessive if he’d been hanging off Hannibal’s coattails.

When they were finally alone again, Hannibal led Will back to the fireplace, rather than the kitchen. He picked his own glass back up and settled in the middle of the loveseat facing the fire, knees wide. He watched Will in silence as the man came and sat on the floor next to him, shoulder barely touching his knee. They stared into the fire together for a long moment, held close by the sudden silence, after so many loud hours.

Will heard Hannibal sigh before he spoke, and he wondered if it was just a sound made so he wouldn’t spook. He was grateful for it.

“I’d say Jack is almost as eager to get you back as he is to catch the Ripper,” Hannibal observed.

Will chuckled and took another long sip of his whiskey, feeling the warmth in his belly grow. “Jack sees me as a *tool* to catch the Ripper.”

“A tool he doesn’t currently have in his toolbox,” Hannibal said. “Would you go back for him, or for the Ripper?”

That was the real question. Will sighed and scrubbed a hand over his face. What would he give up if he went back? Things wouldn't be fixed just by his own interest in the case, he knew.

"I don't know," he answered, his honesty barely heard over the crackle of the fire. "What I do isn't pretty."

"Things are beautiful if you love them," Hannibal replied, opening up more questions with that than he was answering.

"Last time things got-" Will couldn't finish that sentence, instead going back to his drink. He was glad Hannibal couldn't see his face.

"You don't have to look alone," Hannibal said, voice tight. "I can be your paddle, when things get rough."

Will felt his affection turn like a knife in his chest. The idea that he could have that, have someone by his side who wasn't afraid to look too, was close to rejected outright. He always did it alone, he did everything alone. He wasn't sure if he had enough domestication anymore to rely on someone.

Hannibal's hand rested gently on the back of his neck, warm and possessive, thumb edging into his curls. Will let his fears go and focused on the warmth. He huffed out a deep sigh and tucked his shoulder under Hannibal's thigh so he could lay his head on his knee. *There Hannibal was,* he thought, *a solid place to rest his head.*

Maybe, he thought weakly, things would be different this time.

Chapter End Notes

C'mere baby, look at this thing I made you.

The thing: monstrosities beyond your belief

Mirrored

Chapter Summary

What could they possibly get up to, now they're alone?

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes

"Who did you share breakfast with before me?"

Will's question was hesitant, a shift in his posture bringing Hannibal's attention back to where his hand was combing through Will's hair.

"Before you?" Hannibal sighed, trying in all honesty to remember himself *before* Will. Maybe it was the whiskey dulling his senses, maybe the eager flush of arousal that had been building in him all day. Whatever it was, he spoke without pretense. "I ate alone."

Will glanced up at him from where he was sitting on the floor, lips parted slightly, and Hannibal felt every inch of himself stretch and relax. He would have to draw Will one day soon, render him in charcoal perhaps.

"You're here willingly now," he pointed out, letting his hand brush through Will's hair as their eyes stayed fixed on one another's. "How soon you forget that none of my other charms worked on you."

Will grinned in response, licking his lips and shrugging a bit. "Oh, they worked. I just take a while to get going, is all."

Hannibal's hand slipped down to cup Will's cheek, thumb resting on his bottom lip. He wanted more than ever to taste the man's skin, to take Will's hand from where it clutched at his calf and run his tongue between his fingers, get at the webbing. He had been playing it safe for so many weeks, it felt thrilling to throw that to the wind.

"Is that what this is, then? Hmm?" he asked, pulling Will's bottom lip down to see his teeth, his gums. "Are you *going* now?"

Will let a quick breath out through his nose and nodded his head, eyes falling closed. "Yeah, yeah."

Hannibal eased Will's glass from him, after putting his own down on the side table, and took Will's face in both hands. He wanted to look him over properly; this changeling, this perfect child. Everything about Will seemed exaggerated in this first acceptance, everything softer. He wanted to memorize it before he tore it all down.

Will's eyes were still closed when Hannibal kissed him, and they stayed closed as Will turned and climbed into Hannibal's lap. Hannibal got the impression that he couldn't bear to look, and pulled him against his chest, hands going back up to massage his neck and scalp. They fit perfectly together like that, matching pieces finally pressed into place.

"You're a hard-fought prize, my dear," he whispered, pressing kisses into Will's hair, trying not to thrust his hips.

Will let out a sigh and buried his face in Hannibal's neck. Every touch felt fragile and new, and Hannibal's chest felt like it would burst. He'd fed Will for weeks, small bites first, and then more, like a scared dog. He'd killed for him. He'd provided a warm bed and soft clothes, and a hand to hold when he became *(gorgeously)* unsteady. After all that careful planning, just holding the man felt gluttonous.

Finally, after a deep breath to steady himself, Will sat back and let himself be looked at properly. Most of the lights were long turned off, and the fireplace was at his back. Still, he felt exposed. It made him scrabble for something to right the ship.

"Can I," he started, hands going to the buttons of Hannibal's waist coat, "Can I see your shoulder?"

Reminded of Will's fingers, the way he'd popped two sutures in his anger, Hannibal's hips thrust up into his weight before he could stop himself. He found himself unable to speak, and simply nodded and let his hands rest at Will's sides. Will quickly had the waistcoat open, nearly feverish in his attempt to get Hannibal's shirt off. It had been a month, at least, but there was still that strange pull of something inside when Hannibal shouldered his way out of his open shirt and tossed it and the vest aside.

When he finally rested back against the seat, with Will a warm weight in his lap, he felt like a *god.*

"You can touch," he said, watching the way Will's hands hesitated in the hair on his chest, twitching to move higher. "It doesn't hurt anymore."

Will's eyes ticked up to his at that, mouth a flat line in either apprehension or concentration, and then his fingers were pressing around the edges of the pink scar and Hannibal felt more aroused than he had since the last time this had happened. He wanted, *absurdly,* for Will to tear him back open, fingers pressing inside where they simply dug in before. He wanted *penetration,* wanted to be *torn apart.*

"They aren't matching," Will said, after a few long moments.

For a second Hannibal thought he was meant to respond. Something about the way Will sat back was unbearable. Will caught his eye, face still unnervingly serious, and started pulling off his sweater. Hannibal helped, tossing it aside and watching as Will then removed his shirt, pale skin a shock under all those dark layers.

Hannibal finally saw what he meant, and reached up to touch Will's shoulder.

“They’re mirrored,” Will explained, unnecessarily.

Hannibal ran his fingers over the mark on Will’s shoulder, other hand going to his rib cage to steady him in his lap. Will was burning up, from the fire or fever Hannibal didn’t know. It didn’t matter anyway, because Will was bending down and sealing their mouths together, and he tasted of whiskey and warmth and Hannibal just had to let himself *go.*

They kissed roughly, fighting to breathe as Will’s teeth kept catching Hannibal’s bottom lip and pulling at it. All he could do was hold on and let Will take what he wanted.

Will sucked on his tongue and Hannibal was *lost.* His hands fell to Will’s ass and pulled him closer, gripping tight as Will writhed in his lap. His cock ached with pleasure as they met again and again, Will’s erection hot through his clothes and just as hard. Chest to chest, their bodies heated, Will broke out in a sweat. The smell of him filled up Hannibal’s nostrils until all he knew was Will. It was different now, the element of fear was missing, and his arousal couldn’t be ignored.

“Can I-“ Will gasped out between kisses.

“Anything, anything,” Hannibal agreed, and he meant it.

Will nearly fell climbing back to his feet, his hand reaching out to catch Hannibal’s and hold on as he slipped out of his shoes and socks. Hannibal reached for his own zipper when Will finally righted himself and started peeling his pants off. He barely had time to take in Will’s tiny blue boxers before he was there, naked and flushed in the firelight, gorgeous cock standing out of a thatch of dark hair, balls tight up against his body.

Hannibal grunted and shoved his own pants down and off, shoes and one sock going with them, and then held his hands out in invitation. Will’s brow finally smoothed and he knelt back over Hannibal’s lap, ass resting on the man’s knees. He took in his fill as Hannibal tried to remain in one piece.

It was a shock to his system when Will’s hand wrapped around his cock, humming as he seemed to weigh Hannibal’s arousal, thumb rubbing around the wet head and hand squeezing lightly. Then Will’s mouth was back on his and he was sliding forward until the glans of his own cock was slick and butting against his fist.

Hannibal couldn’t take the slow build any longer and batted Will’s hand away, taking both their pricks in one large fist and pulling, *pulling.*

“I, I feel,” Will couldn’t seem to get the words out, fingers digging into Hannibal’s shoulder blades as he let his head roll on his neck.

“Tell me,” Hannibal demanded, licking up the column of Will’s neck and stroking them in time with the rocking of Will’s hips.

“I feel like you’re going to eat me whole,” Will admitted, mouth open and panting as he held on for dear life.

“Not yet, darling,” Hannibal murmured, voice rough with exertion, hips pumping eagerly. “Not yet.”

He could feel the change in Will, the way his body pulled tight as a bowstring, and then Will was shouting and coming into the hot space between them. His hand sped up, thumb rubbing frantically up the underside of his own cock, and Will surprised him again. Will’s hips were still moving, cock still jerking with his release, when he raised his hand and pressed the pads of three fingers into Hannibal’s shoulder, right on top of the scar. Hannibal tripped into orgasm, wild sounds falling from his mouth, and Will just laughed, mouth open wide and face to the ceiling, *joyous.*

Chapter End Notes

> What if I was a cannibal and I wanted to CONSUME you and you said you knew I wanted to eat you whole and then you came in my lap? What then, huh? What fucking then!?!

Whiplash

Chapter Summary

Will has a lot of feelings the morning after, Freddie is the perfect punching bag.

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes

Most of Will's past lovers had become less interested in him directly after they came. He was used to sleepy cuddling, and the rare fuck-and-run. He was, therefore, wholly unprepared for the aftermath of sex with Hannibal. The man had lifted Will and laid his body out on the rug in front of the fire and was then licking and nuzzling him with a hunger unmatched. Where before his touches had been calculated, careful, they were now ravenous and unyielding.

"Jesus H Christ," Will exclaimed, the laugh bubbling up in his throat negating any heat the words might have brought.

Hannibal grunted and continued his deep perusal of Will's body, tongue lapping at Will's underarm hair, breathing roughly through his nose.

"That tickles, you know," Will added, body twitching away and back towards Hannibal's pressing nose.

Hannibal didn't venture an answer, apparently too blissed out at having a naked Will Graham to focus on anything else. Will just closed his eyes and tried to zone out to the sound of the fire. If he let himself engage, let himself continue to be in that room, he'd call the whole thing off in embarrassment. He knew some people liked to...smell their partners, but the way Hannibal was working across his body was something on another scale.

Will didn't have a great relationship with his body to begin with, often so far off in his mind that he forgot to care for it, and as the heat of arousal left his system, he felt too exposed. Every split second between Hannibal's licks was a graveyard of self-consciousness, an abyss of self-loathing. It begged him to take a dive.

When Hannibal finally made it to his neck, knees pressing Will's thighs together as he nearly engulfed him in an embrace, he let Hannibal's weight anchor him.

"Where have you gone?" Hannibal whispered, tongue licking up and behind Will's ear, teeth teasing. "Come back to me."

"Little intense," Will admitted, shifting against the onslaught.

Hannibal hummed and rested his nose in the curls at Will's neck, finally stilling in compromise.

"I, uh, need to get home to the dogs," Will added, worrying he would stay too long and end up never leaving. He thought back to stories he'd read as a kid about vampires and their castles. The ceiling seemed to retreat, and he felt very suddenly like *prey.*

"Of course," Hannibal huffed. "After I'm done with you."

Will snorted out a confused laugh, his cock giving a pathetic little jump between his legs. "You aren't done yet?"

Hannibal pulled back to look at Will's face. Eye contact at that point was totally off the table, and Will's eyes focused on the spot just above Hannibal's left eyebrow. He could hardly breathe, his heart beating away in his chest like a trapped sparrow. He felt minuscule, nanoscopic. He could easily slip between the floorboards and into the basement, he thought.

"You'll shower, quickly, and then I have food to send you home with," Hannibal said.

It was such a relief that Will felt like *crying.* Of course Hannibal wouldn't try to keep him there, try to consume him until daylight. Will allowed himself to be held a while longer, let himself grow lax.

The drive home was a long one, and the second he was in the car he started to worry. A million versions of the next day spilled out in front of him, each more dramatic; Hannibal would feel jilted over him leaving, Hannibal would decide Will was too much work, Hannibal would suggest that sex only happen that once. He had to eschew his own mind.

The Chesapeake Ripper was right there waiting. The man, as it was surely a man, provided the perfect escape.

Will let himself *feel* the Ripper, let his mind go back to the photos Jimmy had passed around. Everything about the body was perfectly planned out, artistically placed. Even the fact that the victim was eviscerated and castrated while still alive lent credence to the feeling of utter control.

Will felt that control roll through him, felt sure hands on the steering wheel, and let himself be pulled further under. There was control and *harmony,* death and life together in the tapestries the Ripper weaved, and the closer he got to understanding the Ripper's motives, the more intense the feelings of power got.

Even the road ahead of him looked different, rife with possibilities. Each car he passed held materials yet to be utilized, and Will soaked in that difference in opinion.

"They're all just meat to you," he murmured to the ghost in his head. "What a relief to feel no greater connection."

And he was slipping, heels right on the edge of some greater understanding, and he wanted to let go. He wanted to embrace the Ripper and fold himself into the man and have his humanity disappear, even if that escape made him into something else, something new.

When he finally made it home, the dogs brought him back to himself, each one of them looking at him like he was the pinnacle of humanity, of humane behavior, instead of the monster taking up space in his head. As always, they made him whole again.

He felt like a teenager with a crush, walking into the teacher's lounge the next day to find Beverly waiting. He still felt warm from seeing Hannibal before classes, still felt that growing heat in his chest. He quickly covered his grin with one hand, afraid it might turn into a never ending burst of laughter. He tried to right himself as he got a cup of coffee, but he still felt slightly manic when he sat down next to her.

"Well if it isn't my dear old friend Will," she said, grinning at him mischievously. "Been busy?"

"Oh, yeah, yeah," Will said, suddenly out of words.

"I'd be worried if I hadn't been hounded by Hannibal for insight into how to ask you out," she said, just waiting for Will to unspool. That got him.

"What, really?" Will asked, trying with all his might to see the scenario in his mind.

"No. But he did ask me how to make a dinner party less painful for you," she admitted. "I told him to make sure the food looked like food. How was it?"

Will huffed out a laugh and brushed a hand over his face. "Actually, well, pretty painless," he said. "And the food looked like food."

She relaxed at that, sitting back to give Will a little room to breathe. There was something else there, but she wasn't going to pry.

"Why the hell did you get a new phone, by the way?" she asked. "I'm still getting everything in double texts. I think your carrier hates mine."

A shadow fell over Will's face and she nearly regretted asking.

"Been sleepwalking," he said, head ducked and eyes on his coffee. "Lost it somewhere."

"Jesus, Will," she exclaimed. "That's not good. You seein' someone about that?" All the fizz had left Will's body, and he was a sunken thing before her. The fact that he didn't reply was answer enough. "Will. You have to get that checked out. Something could really be wrong."

"I'll get an appointment soon," he said. "It only happened twice."

"Hannibal knows about this?" she asked, remembering he was an ER doctor at some point.

Will nodded and she felt a little better. Surely, Hannibal would do something if it got bad.

Will's mood sank steadily as the day went on, hitting near rock bottom when he tried to make an appointment for whatever was going on with his sleep and found out it would take an appointment with his general practitioner before he could even get a referral to a neurologist, and they were booked out until before the first of the year, nearly a month away. Every step added to seeing a specialist was like a little air let out of him, he felt deflated. He made the appointment anyway, and went to teach his last class.

He felt gossamer through the whole class, lecturing on bite marks and suck-bruises, completely unaffected. *Will is offline,* a voice said, coming from inside his own head. *Will is offline.* He stayed that way through question and answer, and barely remembered gathering his things and leaving the building. He must have though, because he was focusing in on two shapes in the distance, and walking past the first row of cars to get to them.

"The people deserve to know if the Mushroom Man is still out there, it's a matter of public safety," Freddie said, as smooth as ever.

Hannibal was mild, not at all perturbed by her questions, but Will missed all that because he was *shaking* with anger.

"Excuse me!" he shouted as he got closer. "Excuse me, what the *hell* do you think you're doing?"

Hannibal smiled, seemingly thrilled at the development, and let Will stand in front of him, blocking his view of the journalist.

Freddie *also* smiled, it was a greasy thing, as she held one limp hand out. "Don't believe we've met, I'm-"

"Outta fuckin' line," Will said, eyes wild behind his glasses.

"I'm only asking for an update on an open case," Freddie countered, looking slightly less pleased to be there and letting her hand fall to her side.

"You lost your impartiality when you decided to take a photo of Hannibal Lecter in his club's locker room and make it look like a nude, you aren't *only asking* anything. You're walking right up to a bear and poking it with a stick," Will spat, seething with barely contained rage at the woman.

"Are you the bear, Professor Graham," Freddie asked, oozing interest, "or is *he* ?"

The double entendre passed right over Will's head, but Hannibal laughed a bit to himself in the background.

"Just leave. You're starting to piss me off," Will said, every bit of control gone, ready to *pull her hair.* He felt *rabid,* hot all over.

Freddie looked pointedly past Will's shoulder, meeting Hannibal's eyes. Hannibal shrugged at her, smug all over, and she rolled her eyes and turned to leave. Will watched her, eager for

her to turn back so he could do something, anything to hammer his point in. He thought about spitting, but found his mouth to be uncomfortably dry. He stood there, hands on his hips and vibrating, until Hannibal came to his side.

Will was glad Hannibal knew not to touch him. He felt like he might snap like some scared dog at any physical touch. He didn't want to hurt Hannibal, and choked on that truth. It took him a minute to get himself under control. Hannibal just stood at his side, waiting for the ship to right.

"She's so irritating," Will said, after clearing his throat.

"Possibly the rudest person I've let live," Hannibal said.

Will laughed at that and heaved in a relieved sigh. "That's going to be all over her fucking zine tomorrow, isn't it?"

"How to piss off Will Graham," Hannibal replied.

Will sniggered, head hanging forward, frame finally going relaxed. There was still something off though, he was drenched in sweat.

"Let me cook for you tonight," Hannibal offered, unable to overcome the impulse. "You must have fish in the freezer."

Will closed his eyes and tried to remember what he had left over from his last catch. Yeah, he had some fish in the freezer. He nodded.

"Perfect," Hannibal murmured. "Will you walk me to my car?"

It was enough to get Will moving again, and he was grateful for that.

Chapter End Notes

> Will Graham telling someone that they're pissing him off can be so personal, you know? Such a beautiful little moment such fancy words 🥳. Yes baby, warn them, let them know you're so mean so terrible!

Sleep

Chapter Summary

Hannibal makes dinner and gets Will to relax.

Chapter Notes

BIT OF NON-CON HERE, DRUGGING

Hannibal was greeted by Will's dogs as a long lost friend, each sidling up to him in turn as he and Will made their way to the kitchen. It was a strong enough show of affection that Hannibal had to stop a few times to let himself be smelled over.

"You're pageant queen," Will said absently, opening the freezer and pulling out a 12 inch bass he'd already cleaned.

Hannibal hummed in agreement, scooping Buster up and holding him under his arm, scratching absently behind his ear. Will wasn't used to seeing his pack with other people, and it settled the timid thing inside him that said Hannibal didn't really want to be there.

"I'll have to run the dogs real quick," he explained, "but you can start on the food if you want. There's a bunch of stuff from the party in the fridge, of course. Couple of lemons on the counter there."

Hannibal put Buster down and traded places with Will, already taking off his jacket and rolling up his sleeves to get to work. "This is beautiful," he said, eyeing the fish. "Do you by any chance have capers?"

Will thought for a moment, imagining the inside of the fridge as he grabbed doggie bags and some treats. "Uh, yeah. I think there's a bottle next to the mayo."

By the time he was ready to take the dogs out, Hannibal had washed his hands and fit himself into Will's kitchen as easily as if he'd done it for years. Will paused in the doorway, dogs rushing past, and watched as Hannibal poured some flour out in a long shallow dish.

"Is this alright?" Hannibal asked, unable to read Will's expression.

Will nodded, still looking far away, and left, screen door closing with a loud bang.

There was a jar of capers, butter, and a sizable lemon. Hannibal busied himself coating the bass and getting the pan hot on the stove. He would serve fish with the side of sautéed green beans he'd sent Will home with, and maybe some dinner rolls. It was a sizable meal, and it calmed Hannibal to see Will had a fairly well stocked fridge. When he'd been there before it had been a bit stark, more half-empty mustard jars than real food.

He could see Will through the window as he cooked, the dogs racing ahead and out through the trees. It was hard to ignore the fact that Will was at a crucial point; Hannibal could feel him opening up, but his stress levels were threatening to destroy that. It wasn't that Hannibal wanted to intervene medically, not in a proper sense, it was more that he wanted one more day of Will love-bitten and soft. Luckily, if Will didn't settle over dinner, he had brought something along that would do the trick.

Decided on that; he focused on the cooking. There was a good possibility that all Will needed was a substantial meal. He let himself hope.

"Everybody in," Will exclaimed, coming through the back door with the dogs not ten minutes later. "Okay, okay, who's hungry? Who's hungry?"

Hannibal enjoyed the little fragmented conversations Will had with his dogs; the same few phrases repeated over and over. He wondered if it took the place of ceremony for Will, a peace found in the reiteration. He did seem calm after speaking to the dogs, even if it didn't last terribly long some days.

"That smells delicious," Will said, coming to sit at the counter after setting out all the dogs bowls with kibble.

Hannibal grinned and nodded, pleased by the usual interested sounds Will was making. He may have been short when it came to conversation, but Will was extremely polite when it came to food. His middle name might as well have been Thank-you-this-is-delicious, and Hannibal wondered how many nights he went hungry as a child.

"A drink, perhaps," Hannibal found himself saying, wanting to remove some of the lacquer of the day from Will, start fresh.

Will grunted in agreement and walked through to the living room to get something. Hannibal assumed it would be whiskey, and reminded himself to bring a few good bottles over the next time he was there. Sure enough, Will came back through with a half empty bottle, and slid behind Hannibal to grab some glasses. He was emanating heat and Hannibal couldn't wait to touch him. He turned slowly, gripped one of Will's hands and, sparing him the eye contact, kissed his knuckles. He tried to keep the moment brief.

"Dinner is almost ready," he said, turning back to the stove.

Will froze for a second where he was before he went back to pouring them a few fingers of whiskey each. Hannibal was trying to thread the needle with him; trying to find the perfect balance of physical attention and space. He knew he'd nearly frightened the man off after the party, and didn't want to chance that again. He was intrigued by their burgeoning relationship, and wanted to keep Will around at least long enough to see what this fever of his was. Not

that he would push Will away, but it might become necessary to distance himself the closer Will got to the truth of him.

"Any new evidence on this Ripper?" he asked, ever indulgent. "We never really got to speak about it after dinner. What do you think of Price's assessment?"

"That he's in love?" Will asked, sitting at the counter, eyes on the glass in his hand. "The romance is undeniable, but love might be a bit far, and love might not preclude him from killing his mate. It's a big risk to take, for someone so solitary."

Hannibal hummed in agreement and started plating dinner. "He's never shown love in his previous work?"

"Love of nature, love of art, love of music and theater, yes. Love of the human variety? Not at all," Will explained. "I guess I always assumed he was alone on purpose."

Hannibal slid a plate in front of Will and handed him cutlery.

"That doesn't sound like a psychopath to me," Hannibal pried, raising his glass to tap against Will's own. "A whole lot of love going on."

Will laughed a bit, thinking. "He's complicated. Not a psychopath, really, no. Definitely a sadist. If you can see it through his eyes, though, nothing he does is uncalled for. There *is* a definite set of rules in play, I just can't pin down a motive."

"Perhaps the motive is outside of the victims," Hannibal said, skirting the edge of oblivion and feeling more bold for it.

"They're just art supplies?" Will asked, really digging into his dinner. "That's what I'm afraid of. Pretty sure that's why we can't catch him."

“But you know him,” Hannibal insisted.

Will laughed at that, stabbing a few green beans with his fork. “Wouldn’t say I know him. He’s, uh, he’s more clear in my mind than the others, but it’s been eight months. A lot could have changed in that time.”

Hannibal watched as Will finished his food, cleaning his plate with half of a dinner roll, and pondered his next move. “The others?”

Will sighed and ran a hand over his face. “The Driller was the last one.”

“He was caught over the summer, if I'm not mistaken,” Hannibal said, taking Will’s plate and fork and adding them to the dishes in the sink, turning the hot water on.

With a grunt, Will got to his feet and joined Hannibal at the sink, towel at the ready. He was silent long enough to have Hannibal thinking he’d done some bad math. He didn’t really care about the Driller, after all, he just wanted to hear more about himself.

“Remember how I said I got bored,” Will finally said, whole body focused on drying whatever Hannibal handed to him.

“Monotony,” Hannibal agreed.

“Yeah. That was the Driller; monotonous. I was surprised we even got the case, what with the victim profile. Nobody cares about single women dying when they aren’t wealthy and white,” Will explained. “I wish I could have…”

Hannibal continued washing the dishes, last piece the shallow dish he used to coat the fish, and let Will think. He was so clearly fighting an internal battle.

“Another drink,” Hannibal suggested, “then we should go sit on the porch. It’s a beautiful evening.”

There was a hesitation in Will’s frame, and Hannibal wondered if he felt the way Hannibal was trying to corral his thoughts. Will didn’t enjoy being directed.

“Let me just,” Will said, apparently in need of counsel as he walked through to the dogs.

Hannibal took the chance to put a few drops of something in his drink, hands back at his side when Will came through again. He picked up his own glass and let Will add another finger of whiskey, then righted his sleeves and slipped on his jacket.

“Front porch has two chairs,” Will explained, nodding in the direction and letting Hannibal follow closely behind. When they were both seated, breath fogging in the air, he spoke again. “Change in subject might be needed.”

“Tell me your first thought when you saw the photo of me that Freddie took,” Hannibal said, watching as Will sipped his drink, nearly choking.

“The one with the,” Will tried. “Not the bloody one.”

Hannibal smiled to himself. “No, not the bloody one.”

Will finished his drink in one swig, tucking the glass next to his chair, and pressed his palms against his eyes. Hannibal watched him remember, watched the tight intake of breath, and wondered how long it would take for his concoction to gentle the man’s anxiety.

“It felt, uh, inappropriate,” Will admitted with a laugh.

“Your first thought was that it was inappropriate,” Hannibal pressed, amused.

“No,” Will admitted, legs going out straight as he struggled with the truth. “My first thoughts were decidedly pornographic.”

Hannibal smiled to himself, he knew that soon Will wouldn’t be able to pronounce the word pornographic. He was already growing more lax in his seat, working his mouth more than usual.

“I’d like to have you right here,” Hannibal admitted. He needed confirmation.

Will let out a weak laugh and looked over at him, confused and gorgeously flushed. “It’s a little cold for-”

Hannibal surprised him by standing from his seat and looming over him. Their eyes met as Hannibal finished his drink, and Will’s were wide and searching. Hannibal knelt between Will’s knees, and Will understood.

“I said I’d like to have you,” Hannibal pressed, hands slipping up Will’s thighs, gripping at him.

“Yes,” Will all but whispered.

Hannibal gave him a break from eye contact and focused on brushing his thumbs closer and closer to Will’s cock, humming in appreciation as Will’s legs fell open.

“Gorgeous,” he whispered, massaging the inside of Will’s thighs.

“I feel,” Will whispered back, barely louder than his breath. He didn’t finish the thought. His head just hung back, eyes unfocused, pointed to the ceiling.

Hannibal opened the button and unzipped his pants, rucking up his shirt and leaning in to press hot kisses to his lower abdomen, nosing into his pubic hair.

“Jesus,” Will whimpered, body responding beautifully to Hannibal’s attention.

Hannibal was less interested in his input at that point, though, and didn’t even manage to reply or encourage him as he pulled his prick free and ran his open mouth from root to tip, tongue dipping out to taste.

“I should have showered,” Will tried, eyes screwed shut.

“Nonsense,” Hannibal grunted, finally taking the leaking head into his mouth and applying pressure with his tongue to the soft spot below the head.

He continued, taking more and more of Will into his mouth, spit easing the way as Will grew harder in his grip. Will might have been saying something, but Hannibal was so focused on his taste, on the way he twitched, that he missed it. He just kept going, letting Will into the back of his throat, pushing him closer and closer to orgasm.

He wanted Will, wanted all of him, and he wanted Will to come. Like every other part of his life, Hannibal had enough experience to get exactly what he wanted, and Will was soon shaking and spilling into his mouth, bitter and hot.

“Hannibal,” was all Will could manage, nearly slipping out of his chair.

Hannibal tucked him back into his pants and helped Will from his seat and back into the house, depositing him on the edge of his bed and kneeling to unlace Will’s shoes.

“I’m sorry,” Will said, voice soft, confused. “I’m so tired.”

“No apology necessary, darling,” Hannibal said, easing Will out of his shoes and socks. “You need to sleep.”

Will just grunted as Hannibal stripped him down to his boxers and undershirt, and helped him under the covers. He was nearly unconscious by the time Hannibal pulled away. The dogs circled Hannibal as he turned on their space heater and gathered their food bowls, following him into the kitchen to watch him clean them. When he was done, Hannibal got his things together and let the dogs out for a late night piss in the dark. They were good enough to come back in when he called.

A Show

Chapter Summary

The Ripper finally gives Will a motive, and Hannibal shows his possessive side to Jack.

Chapter Notes

Okay, you gorgeous people, we've made it past 40,000 words in one month!!! Let's fucking hear it for this momentum!!!!

We're celebrating tonight, babes! Playing the album

Rich Rich by Ufo361

nonstop! Let's get some crazy shit going up in here! Bad Girls, Good Vibes in this motherfucker! Hit me up in the comments like it's the fucking chat feature we'll never seeeee!!

See the end of the chapter for more notes

Will barely made it out of the classroom that Monday morning before he was being apprehended by Jack Crawford. If not apprehended, then corralled.

"Can I help you?" Will asked, a little pissed off, to be honest.

"Not here," was all Jack said, pulling Will into the nearest empty room and closing the door. When they were finally alone, Jack turned and looked him up and down. "Do you really want us to catch the Ripper?"

Will knew exactly what he was doing, used to Jack's manipulation tactics. He was meant to declare his loyalty, to demand to be seen as an obedient soldier in Jack's eyes.

"Just tell me what happened," Will said, hands on his hips.

Jack balked at that, hands curling into fists. "You're either on the team or not. I only give out information to my team, Will."

And, Christ, if that wasn't exactly how things used to be.

"I'm in this to catch the Ripper, but I also have a day job." Will countered. "I'm not going to be at your beck and call."

“That’s not how this works,” Jack replied, trying to stand his ground, as if he had any right to.

Will stepped back as Jack tried to adjust his glasses for him, reacting badly to the touch. He was about to tell Jack to stick his offer as far up his own ass as he could manage, when the door opened.

Hannibal stood for a second in the doorway, looking blandly between the two men, before entering the room and handing Will a paper cup of coffee. Will took it and went to stand at the window, looking out onto the quad. It felt like he’d been tapped out in a relay, and that was fine by him.

“Hannibal,” Jack tried, “now really isn’t the time.”

“I disagree,” Hannibal stated, bringing the only bit of calm to the room. “Will needs all the coffee he can get. Have you told him about the new body?”

It was a beautiful thing to observe, the way Jack fought with his instinct, the way he tried to come up with an excuse as to why he hadn’t, all of it apparent on his face as he twisted under Hannibal’s scrutiny.

Hannibal tutted, face pulling into a scolding look. “This is no time for office politics, Jack, not with the Ripper on the hunt. We expect one more body, do we not?”

Will listened to their shuffling little tiff from the comfort of the corner of the room, letting Hannibal take the brunt of it as he sipped his coffee. He wasn’t used to people stepping in between him and Jack’s anger, and he felt Hannibal’s overprotective stance as a growing warmth in his abdomen. Apparently, being looked after was arousing. Who would have thought?

“Three o’clock,” Jack finally said, directing the comment to Will’s back. “Meet us in the lab and I’ll give you all the information you need.”

Hannibal hummed in appreciation, and Will nodded to let Jack know he’d heard. He didn’t turn around as Jack left the room in a huff, nearly slamming the door behind himself. He still didn’t turn as Hannibal came to stand beside him, but he did relax a bit.

“How did you know I needed help?” he asked, giving Hannibal a few seconds of eye contact before looking back out the window.

Hannibal moved closer, hand slipping up under Will’s jacket and resting between his shoulder blades. “I only knew you needed coffee,” Hannibal said, leaning in to run his nose across Will’s collar. “I will admit I find it a bit distressing having another man drag you into an empty room.”

Will let his eyes close, that heat in his belly sparking at the insinuation. “That’s not really,” he tried.

Hannibal’s nose pressed behind his ear and he couldn’t speak further. He felt trapped, like a butterfly tacked to a board, with Hannibal’s hand pressing covetously and all the *smelling* he

was doing. It was almost too much as he pictured what they looked like from the other side of the glass; like lovers, *like lovers.*

“He’s quite possessive,” Hannibal murmured, breath hot against Will’s neck, “for a man who’s never had you in his throat.”

“Jesus,” Will sighed, gripping his coffee a little too tightly, feeling the paper bend.

“Sometimes I think he wants you just as much as I do,” Hannibal continued. “Though perhaps for different reasons.”

“Definitely for different reasons,” Will said, flushed with how strange it felt to talk about Jack that way while he was aroused.

“He wants power over you,” Hannibal pressed. “The only difference is whether or not he’ll make it good for you.”

The room was too hot, or Will was too hot, or Hannibal’s hand on his back was too hot. It was all a bit too much.

“No,” Will said, hoping his voice would hold. “The only difference is I don’t want him to have power over me.”

There was a pause as Hannibal took in what Will wasn’t saying, and then Hannibal was pulling the back of Will’s shirt from his waistband and his hand was hot and solid on his skin, up between his shoulders. It felt like he would sink his hand in, grip Will’s spine next. Will could feel him holding back, could feel the restraint.

“What are you waiting for?” Will asked, voice soft and meant for just them.

“What would you allow?” Hannibal countered. “The door is open, the window just there. What could I have of you with everyone so near?”

Will was overheated, and painfully aroused. The thought of being caught out had him squirming, chewing on the edge of the paper cup. He couldn’t answer, couldn’t admit that he would allow basically anything at that point. He felt greedy in a way that was becoming familiar.

“I have class,” he said, knowing it was just an excuse.

“Just a taste, then,” Hannibal agreed, tongue lapping at Will’s ear, dipping into the curve of it, hot and hard.

“You’re insatiable,” Will gasped.

Hannibal hummed, almost in agreement, and slipped his hand down and under Will’s pants, under his boxers, gripping one asscheek hard enough for Will to grunt and thrust his hips.

“Hannibal,” Will said, unsure if was in rebuke or encouragement.

Hannibal let out a deep sound of approval and was pulling away as if it took no will at all to do so. It brought a growl from Will's throat, and Hannibal just laughed as he tucked Will's shirt back into his slacks.

"You said you had class," Hannibal said, teasing Will as he drew away.

"Won't be able to concentrate now," Will complained, finally turning and looking Hannibal over. He looked entirely too put together.

Hannibal smiled knowingly and shrugged, hands slipping into his pockets. "We could always find a darker corner. It could be quick, if not involved."

Will weighed his options as Hannibal simply looked on like a pleased cat. He shook his head, unwilling to go to class covered in sweat from a quickie in some broom closet.

"Tonight, then," Hannibal offered. "Come to my office once you're done here. My last patient leaves at six."

"Aren't you coming to the lab?" Will asked, changing his plans immediately in his head.

Hannibal shook his head. "Jack has me working on a different case."

"Then yes," Will agreed. "Six-thirty?"

Hannibal raised his hand and cupped Will's face, thumb pressing between Will's lips. He got in between Will's teeth to the first knuckle before Will bit down, warning. When Will relaxed he pulled his hand away, thumb going into his own mouth. Will made a pained sound and rolled his eyes before fixing his shirt and heading out the door, back to his classroom.

"Well, look what the cat dragged in," Beverly said, smiling at Will as he walked through the door to the lab later that day.

The body was on a stainless steel table in the middle of the room, Jimmy on one side and Brian Zeller on the other. Will was glad Jack wasn't there yet.

"Welcome back," Jimmy added.

"Temporarily," Will said, pulled in by the grotesque nature of the body, chest a gaping maw.

Jimmy nodded. "Let me fill you in."

He explained that the victim was found at the local opera house, the Lyric, displayed on the main stage with his heart in his hands, literally. Will flipped through the photos of the scene, all different angles of the man on one knee, hands raised in front of him, his offering resting in them. Beverly showed him the metal wiring that had been used to keep the victim in place, and everyone took a step back while Will looked into the dead man's open chest.

"He took the liver, the spleen, most of his ribs, and the lungs," Brian said, watching Will with a sort of trepidation.

Will pulled on a pair of nitrile gloves, the feeling against his skin bringing him closer to the realization that he was really back in it than the body managed to, and ran his hands along the opening where the victim's skin was peeled back.

"Flowers and a show," Jimmy said. "Oh, to be wooed by a serial killer."

"He didn't give 'em the show," Brian argued. "He killed the new conductor, stopping the show entirely. The opera house took six months to find this guy. There won't be shows for a while now. Shitty present, if you ask me."

"Maybe he was a bad conductor," Bev offered. "Took him out so his love interest wouldn't have to live through a performance."

"Used what was leftover for a valentine?" Jimmy asked, pushing the tray with the dead man's heart towards Will encouragingly.

"Maybe that's how we catch him," Will said, turning the perfect heart this way and that. "We hone in on his love interest, instead of him."

"She goes to the opera," Brian said. "So whoever she is, she has money."

"I don't know why you insist the love interest is a woman," Jimmy griped.

"Statistically," Brian bit back, "the Ripper is a man. Therefore, statistically, his love interest is-"

"Yes, I know," Jimmy allowed, waving his hand in dismissal.

Beverly moved closer to Will, watching his mouth as he examined the heart. "What do you think?"

Will took a moment, hands gripping the edge of the table as he let his eyes fall closed. The victim was posed perfectly on the stage in his mind's eye, offering his heart to the rafters. It was a gift, but there was more.

"We finally have a motive," Will explained, coming back to himself. "If he knew the conductor enough to disagree with his employment at the Lyric, he's a fan of that specific opera house himself. Add that to our list of features for the Ripper. He's finally told us something about himself."

"We have one more to go, if he's still doing sounders of three," Brian pointed out.

"Dinner," Jimmy said bleakly. "Some poor chef is currently living out their final days."

The rest of the room made sounds of agreement, and Will went back to looking at the photos. He tried as best he could to hide his excitement, but it was tight in his throat. The Ripper gave them motive, and for the first time Will felt it was all for him.

Tchaikovsky’s Dance of the Sugar Plum Fairy played into the room, coming from speakers built high into the wall. The counters shone silver in the abrasive fluorescent lighting where they weren’t covered in bright red blood. Hannibal stood at the far end of the room, gloved hands prepping the meat with polyolefin for sealing.

The liver, ribs, and spleen would be packed and stuck into cooling, to be used another day, but the lungs had to be used that night. He cut away the lungs carefully from the trachea, pressing the air out of them before setting them on their own stainless steel platter. The trachea would be dried and given to Will’s dogs the next time he visited, and he set it aside and went to put the freshly packed meat in the built-in freezer, placing them just so and admiring his own handiwork.

The song started over and he whistled along, grabbing a large sponge and starting on cleanup. Swaying with the music, he moved along the counter with ease, pulling the blood forward with gentle swipes so he could rinse it into the drain in the middle of the floor. He needed to finish with the meat and get back to his office within the hour, or Will would be stuck out in the cold. He didn’t want that, he wanted to be good to Will. He hummed, gloved hands covered in foamy blood, and smiled to himself, thinking that perhaps being in a relationship wouldn’t be that hard after all.

Chapter End Notes

They are so fucking horny and I can't fucking stand it *fuuuuuuuck*

Hunger

Chapter Summary

Hannibal makes Will some comfort food and asks him about the new victim.

Hannibal's office building managed to be just as intimidating as the first time, Will thought, pulling into a free spot on the street and staring up at it. He still couldn't shake the feeling that the windows were watching him. It was long past sundown, and his breath fogged in the air as he made his way up the path to the front entrance. He felt naked without even Pad Thai as an offering to the intimidating place, and was a little relieved when he made it into the lobby to find the office door standing open. At least he wouldn't have to knock.

Will knew he was letting his anxiety get to him, but that sense of being out of place in Hannibal's world was always a slap to the face. His nerves peaked as he walked further into the room, blinking his eyes at the brightness of it, and still didn't see Hannibal.

"Will."

Hannibal's voice came from the second floor, the open bookcase that surrounded three quarters of the room, and Will felt adrenaline spike in his stomach. He looked around for Hannibal and only settled slightly when he found him, up and to his left.

"I was just organizing my journals," Hannibal said, hand on a single soft-bound notebook. "Would you mind closing the door?"

Will spun on his heel, and clumsily closed and locked the door he'd come through, suddenly very out of sorts. He wandered back into the middle of the room, hands settling on his hips as he tried to figure out where he was meant to stand. He wanted Hannibal to come down, both because he wanted to touch the man, and because it was doing something funny to his stomach to have to look up to speak to him. It was unsettling.

"How was the lab?" Hannibal asked, apparently perfectly fine continuing to putter around up in the air.

"Good. Good. Strange," Will corrected. "being back in the bowels of the FBI. That place feels decidedly separate from the rest of the world. I don't even think they keep the same time."

Hannibal huffed out a laugh, turning his back on Will to continue along the edge of one bookcase. Will wanted to *shout* at him. *Pay attention to me.* He wasn't used to waiting so long for the man to be right up in his space, and it felt wrong somehow. The distance was suffocating.

“And the newest victim?” Hannibal pressed. “What of that? More romance in the air?”

Will chewed on that thought a while. He’d been asking himself the same question for hours, and something just wouldn’t sit right. “I’m not sure,” he admitted.

Hannibal paused in what he was doing for only a second before he went back to whatever it was. He was seemingly happy to wait for more from Will.

“This one was less imaginative,” Will finally explained. “The romance seems almost like a second thought.”

Hannibal paused again, this time turning to look down at Will. The lighting did something unusual to his brow, hiding his eyes in shadow, and Will had to look away.

“How so?” Hannibal asked, hands now on the railing, looking like a possibly benevolent god. *Possibly.*

“Well, the first victim was used as a show of affection, an intricate bouquet. This one was killed, we think, because of his job. Maybe you’ll know more about this than me, but it looks to me like the Ripper didn’t like who they picked to conduct next at the Lyric. It just seems selfish,” Will admitted.

He missed the look that passed over Hannibal’s face as he glanced back at his own shoes and sat on the edge of the large desk in the middle of the room. There was a long moment where neither of them spoke, and Hannibal’s voice sounded slightly different when he did.

“The heart in hand is nothing then?” he asked.

“Not nothing,” Will disagreed. “Just not as personal as the first victim. He was on the stage, he was holding his heart out in public.” Will’s voice gave out slightly on the last word, like it was distasteful. “That wasn’t for his love interest, that was for him.”

The grandfather clock in the corner seemed too loud in Will’s ears, and he found himself looking up to see Hannibal, shading his eyes, worried he’d said something wrong.

“Is that how the Ripper loves, then?” Hannibal asked, eyes still in shadow. “Selfishly?”

Will let himself laugh a little at that. It was almost true, almost right. Hannibal always did that when they spoke, always gave him something *almost* right so he had a spot to push off against.

“He might just be new at it,” Will allowed at last. “Affection, between solitary people, it can take some work.”

There was the whisper of something in what he was saying, and he felt it after he spoke like a shadow in the room.

“Sometimes it is hard to differentiate between the object of our desires, and our desires themselves. How we relate to others often has our own wants bleeding through,” Hannibal

said. “What appears selfish could simply be the Ripper knowing himself. Why should he deny the spotlight now?”

Will closed his eyes, breathing in deeply as the scene floated into place behind his eyelids. The victim knelt, hands offering up his heart, and Will stood in the front row, looking across at him. He felt the Ripper in his skin; felt accomplished on his behalf.

A crowd roared to life, applause taking over the building, and Will’s eyes went to them. He searched the sea of faces, trying to find the person this show was for. An empty seat about halfway up was shrouded in shadow, obvious.

The crowd cut out suddenly, gone in the blink of an eye, and Will looked back at the stage. He blinked several times, the victims' hands coming apart, heart beating in his chest. Several more blinks and his lungs and ribs joined the heart, skin folding back and easing itself together. The conductor knelt, whole again, and Will woke.

“What did you see?” Hannibal asked, somehow already down the ladder and speaking to Will from mere inches away.

Will shook like a leaf, drawing in a ragged breath. “He’s going to bring them to the opera. It’s both, it’s both.”

“Both what, Will,” Hannibal asked, eyes flitting over Will’s face.

“Selfish and romantic,” Will said, smiling strangely. “I was wrong. The love interest hasn’t been to the opera before. The Ripper wanted their first show to be perfect. That’s why the conductor had to go.”

Hannibal embraced Will then, pulled him into his arms, and Will let out a small sob. It felt like an eternity since he’d been touched by Hannibal, and he couldn’t help the way he fell into his arms, *exhausted.*

“What a gorgeous gift you have,” Hannibal murmured in wonder, running his left hand soothingly down Will’s back as he held him close.

Will’s head was shaking, but he couldn’t manage a reply. He was sapped of energy and if Hannibal hadn’t been holding him up, he was sure he’d have been on the floor. He let himself be led to Hannibal’s desk chair, and Hannibal knelt in front of him, watching him with soft eyes.

“Let me feed you,” Hannibal finally said, brushing Will’s hair from his brow. “I have dinner ready at home. Did you see to the dogs before you came?”

Will nodded, slowly coming back to himself, feeling exposed. “Yeah, I’ve got time.”

“Perfect,” Hannibal said. “That’s all that I ask."

Will followed Hannibal’s Bentley to his home, parking beside him in the space off the street. He locked his car and followed Hannibal to the back door, slipping in as it was opened for

him. The second he was in the door he froze, looking back at Hannibal with a questioning look that turned into a full on smile.

“What are you cookin' up, Hannibal?” he asked, smiling wider and making his way unprompted to the kitchen.

Hannibal followed behind, thrilled at the prospect of surprising Will. He’d worked for the last twenty four hours straight to get everything ready, and knew he’d managed to get it right when Will walked right up to the slow cooker and hugged the machine to his chest, pulling it to the edge of the counter, the length of cord tightening.

“It smells like home in here,” Will admitted, eyes closing as he took it all in.

“Cajun style ribs, slow cooked. We have cornbread and slaw as our sides. I take it you’re amenable.” Hannibal said, coming up next to Will and resting his hand on the small of his back.

“Oh, is that all?” Will asked, laughing and finally letting the slow cooker go to stand back.

“No,” Hannibal replied, drawing away to open a cabinet and bring out two glasses and a bottle he’d been saving. He opened the bottle and poured a few fingers into each glass, holding one up to Will. “Sugarfield Straight Bourbon Whiskey.”

“Why, Doctor,” Will said, face as open as it had ever been for Hannibal, “if I didn’t know better, I’d think you were trying to win me over.”

Hannibal let him take a long draw of the bourbon and swallow, before he stepped into Will’s space and leaned in to speak against his ear. “Only since the moment we met. Have I finally gotten it right?”

Will let out a small laugh and wrapped his arm around Hannibal’s waist, pulling him closer, pressing himself up against the man. He mirrored Hannibal’s previous actions, nosing around the man’s collar and breathing him in fully, hoping his gratitude was obvious. Hannibal made a gorgeous sound in his throat and Will let himself pull away far enough to look him in the eye.

“You’ve been getting it right for a while,” Will murmured, eyes searching Hannibal’s face. “But you know that, don’t you?”

Hannibal shrugged and leaned in to kiss him, tongue pressing hot into his mouth to taste the bourbon on him. Will set his glass on the counter and let Hannibal have all of his attention, every ounce of him. They stood kissing slowly for a long while, heat growing between them, until Will’s stomach growled enough for both of them to hear.

“Dinner, I think,” Hannibal suggested, fingers tracing Will’s mouth, threatening to dip in.

Will let the puff of air from his nose and a nod be his only answer, scrabbling to get his drink back in his hand. He stayed close as Hannibal started to plate dinner, finger stealing some of the barbecue sauce as Hannibal gave the ribs one last coat.

“Damn, that’s good,” he said, reaching out for more.

Hannibal slapped his hand away playfully. “I make my own creole seasoning. Most people don’t put in enough white pepper.”

Will followed him into the dining room and Hannibal sat them at the head of the table, Will to his left. Will settled into his seat as Hannibal grabbed a few more things from the kitchen and lit a few candles and lights. When he eventually settled into his seat at the head of the table, Will couldn’t wait any longer to tear into the ribs.

“These are perfect,” he said, fingers covered in sauce. “I’m afraid to ask if it’s a special occasion. I’m not terribly good with dates.”

Hannibal looked so much more human while eating with his hands, and he sucked one finger between his lips before answering, enjoying the look it drew from Will.

“No special occasion,” he said. “Just good timing. My butcher had the ribs when I went earlier this week, and it felt right.”

Hannibal’s mind went back to the conductor, tied down to a stainless steel table, gargling on his own blood as Hannibal clipped back his ribs. Clip. Clip. *Clip.*

“I wanted to indulge you,” he added.

“That’s a theme,” Will said, picking up some of the coleslaw with a piece of cornbread and running the toe of his shoe up under the hem of Hannibal’s slacks. “If you were any less careful I’d say you were trying to gorge me. Fatten me up.”

“You’ve lived too long on so little,” Hannibal said, skirting close to something they both wanted to keep secret. He spoke less of food, and more of that human need for connection they’d both been so starved of.

“Hunger grows personal,” Will agreed. “Long enough, and it’s a good friend.”

“Easier to abstain than live through the dry spells knowing something different?” Hannibal asked, sipping his drink and watching Will continue to eat with gusto.

“The familiar can soften any sharp pangs,” Will agreed.

Hannibal hummed, understanding. “Yet you allow me to rewrite your familiar, one breakfast at a time.”

Will gave a wry laugh and shook his head, looking up at Hannibal fondly. “You didn’t give me a choice, did you?”

Hannibal allowed that, as it was the truth, and finished his plate. “Seconds?”

Will nodded, humming in agreement, and held his plate out as Hannibal stood. “You know me,” he said, looking up through his eyelashes, “I’m always hungry.”

Push

Chapter Summary

Hannibal offers Will something he can't say no to.

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes

Hannibal was sucking Will's fingers into his mouth, greedy for the last bits of cayenne pepper and brown sugar, teeth scraping against the pads of his fingers and taking them into that wet heat, tonguing at the space between them. They'd only just stumbled up the stairs together, tearing at their clothes as soon as they made it into Hannibal's bedroom. Will pulled away to take off his shirt, one hand getting stuck in the cuff.

"Would you let me?" Hannibal asked, apropos of nothing. He looked on as he sat on the edge of the bed to remove his shoes and socks.

Sure, Will thought weakly, *anything.*

"Let you what?" he asked, kneeling to get his own shoes off.

"Gorge you," Hannibal said, as if that was a thing someone would say. His eyes were bright, but his face was unreadable. "Feed you until you were sick? Twenty courses? Thirty?"

Will snorted out a laugh, refusing to answer.

"Ribs, steak, mushroom stuffed heart," Hannibal continued. "Fingerling potatoes and carrots, string beans and gravy. A whole course of soups."

Will hummed along, feeling a bit over full right then as he stepped out of his pants and joined Hannibal where he was, laying back on the bed, watching him.

"Dessert?" Will prompted, settling on his side and fumbling his glasses onto the side table.

"Chocolate mousse, ganache and sorbets," Hannibal explained, folding the comforter down and pulling Will right up against him under the covers, wrapping one leg around his hip and giving a long roll of his pelvis. "Crepes and cakes, and dessert wine. Enough fresh berries and cream that you couldn't stand another thing in your mouth."

Will wrapped his arm around Hannibal's back and thrust his hips, hard cock slipping against Hannibal's own in that hot space between them. He was overcome already, hanging on for dear life.

“And an apple?” he teased, thinking he could see where Hannibal was going with this. “To hold between my teeth?”

Hannibal’s lips drew back in a snarl, breath coming hard as he gripped Will’s ass with painful force, and slipped two fingers into his mouth. He always seemed to want to do that, Will realized, surprised when Hannibal proceeded with an examination of his teeth, counting them from the inside, top and bottom.

“A pomegranate,” Hannibal corrected, leaning in to add his tongue to the mix, licking into Will’s mouth next to his fingers.

Will shook his head, dislodging Hannibal’s fingers and leaning back to breathe. He felt faint, he hadn’t been this eager since college, and his cock begged for more friction, but he had to push back because he saw what Hannibal was saying.

“If I’m to eat the pomegranate,” he gasped, canting his hips and looking Hannibal directly in the eye. “Does that make you the serpent? What hidden truths are you here to show me, devil? Hmm?”

Hannibal pushed closer, body rolling so he was covering Will as he reached into the bedside table drawer and brought out a few condoms and some lube. He fell back, pressing his offering between them and grinning at Will.

“Is self-knowledge lofty enough a goal?” he asked. “I’ll take your fingers in me now, I think.”

Will groaned and rubbed his face hard with both hands. Leave it to Hannibal to derail with such an enticing idea. He grabbed the bottle of lube, uncapping it and pouring more than enough into his hand. Hannibal smiled at him, cheeks and neck stained pink with exertion, and lifted one knee. Will gave Hannibal’s cock a wet stroke, just to throw him off his rhythm, and gripped his balls, pulling gently before rubbing just behind.

Hannibal was an arresting, broken mess as Will pushed the tips of two fingers right into him with barely a tease. He grunted at the intrusion, panted out a few hot gasps as Will rolled his wrist, thrusting slightly.

“Would you let me gorge you, on everything you’ve ever wanted?” Hannibal bit out, bringing Will back to the here and now.

He smiled at Hannibal’s persistence and pushed his free hand into the gray and blond curls covering Hannibal’s chest. He gripped tightly, pulling before he spoke. “You could try.”

He laughed at the anguished sound Hannibal made, fingers pulling and pushing, threatening to take Hannibal completely apart, tear him to pieces. He covered Hannibal’s lips with his own, sucked the breath out of his chest and they were kissing, fighting with their mouths, a hot, wet press of lips and tongue. Hannibal was always so hungry to taste him, Will thought, letting him suck on his tongue.

“More,” Hannibal managed, trying to keep his head from rolling back as Will pressed into him all the way and curled his fingers to catch his rim on the pull out.

“Jesus,” Will huffed, sliding a third finger in and pressing his thumb up against Hannibal’s perineum. “Always wanting more of me. You make a habit out of trying to expand the edges of what I’ll allow, don’t you?”

“Yes,” Hannibal shouted, riding Will’s fingers so his chest was on fire with pain. Will let go of the hair there after a moment and just stroked him. “Yes.”

“What will you do, do you think, when you meet that final edge?” Will asked, pulling his fingers free and tearing open a condom “When I finally refuse to budge?”

Hannibal fell back against the pillows, letting his legs open wide in invitation. “All the answers are just on the other side of that line,” he explained.

Will had to breathe a few seconds with his thumb and forefinger tight around the base of the condom. He’d imagined this moment a million different ways, earlier that night it had involved Hannibal’s desk, but nothing could have prepared him for how enigmatic Hannibal would be, sex personified with his mouth open and legs spread. If he hadn’t been hard before, the waves of pleasure rolling off of Hannibal in that moment would have had him there in a second. He could feel his own arousal merging with Hannibal’s, could feel the space between what Hannibal wanted and what he wanted folding like cheap plastic. In a frightening blink of an eye, they were one.

“Take what you came here for,” Hannibal pleaded, unsure of Will’s pause.

Will climbed over, tucking his knees up high under Hannibal’s thighs and holding his cock out, rubbing it around Hannibal’s hole with unbelievable restraint. “Fuck,” he whispered, hissing as Hannibal reached up to pull the hair near the back of his skull.

He refused to give in, unwilling to give up the heady power he held at that moment. “Tell me the truth,” he said, pushing just the head of his cock into Hannibal’s hole and pulling it back out again with a wet pop. “What are you going to do when I finally say no?” In, *in,* and out again. The heat was unreal.

Hannibal struggled and Will grinned wildly. He could finally see what it would take to *get the beast to tell the truth.*

“I would find that final barrier,” Hannibal growled, unable to do anything but confess, “and push.”

With all his might, Will thought, finally burying himself in Hannibal’s ass with a hard thrust. It had the desired effect, and Hannibal lost all grip on the English language and was mumbling and cursing in some foreign tongue.

“I believe you,” Will murmured, bending over Hannibal and rutting into him with brutal strength.

He kissed the next fumbled words from Hannibal's mouth, grunting against his lips as he fought to keep from coming too quickly. Hannibal was so hot and slick around him, shuddering and shifting his hips as Will continued to drive into him, deeper, *deeper.* He fucked Hannibal with such growing force that there was something shouting in the back of his mind, telling him he was going to break him in two.

"Don't stop," Hannibal begged, appearing to sense something in Will's composure. "You can't hurt me."

I can, Will thought, fingers digging into Hannibal's sides, nails catching. *I will.* He cried out, another shout building inside him, and bit down hard, low on Hannibal's neck. He wanted to prove him wrong, he realized, a dizzy feeling taking over as Hannibal clenched around him at the bite.

"Do it," Hannibal demanded, wrapping a sweat slicked hand around his cock as Will continued to pump into him.

The second Will's teeth broke the skin he was backpedaling, sitting back with a wild look in his eyes, blood covering his lips as something sick twisted in him at the sight of Hannibal. "Oh, god," he panted, hips moving on their own, driving violently into the heat of Hannibal's body. He tasted blood on his tongue and his eyes were burning with sweat, and he was drowning in salt and copper, moving towards something that suddenly seemed like a frighteningly dangerous end. *La petite mort, it was not.*

Hannibal grinned up at him, teeth bared and fisting himself with nearly bruising force. He looked like another man entirely, blood pooling in the divot of his collarbone, hair disheveled, eyes on fire, and Will fell head first into orgasm, vision going blessedly dark as he buried his prick in Hannibal's body and came with such force it felt *sucked* out of him. Hannibal's body convulsed and gripped him, drank him down until he fell aside like an empty thing, gasping for breath, amazed he was still whole.

Chapter End Notes

Slaps the side of this sex scene: This baby can fit so many startling realizations in it, so many nods towards repression and catholic guilt. Plus it has ten cup holders.

If you guys want to have a fun little roller coaster, and see how Will and his approach to Hannibal has changed over these 35 thousand words or so, go read chapter 9 again, and then this one. Holy whiplash Batman, our boy is eating. 🙌👀🍗😩♥

Reflect

Chapter Summary

Hannibal and Will reflect on their new relationship with their own trusted confidants.

Bedelia had the rarely afforded opportunity of preparing herself for her meeting with Hannibal. That was distressing on its own, as it meant Hannibal had something specific to talk about, but she felt herself growing rapidly more distressed as she scrolled through Freddie Lounds' latest article on him. Bedelia didn't particularly like the woman, but she did keep track of Hannibal better than anyone who had previously tried.

The front page held a photo of a sweaty Will Graham pacing in front of Hannibal, looking like a rabid dog under the headline: FBI PROFILER TO THE PRESS: "YOU'RE PISSING ME OFF!"

There were a few paragraphs outlining Hannibal's previous work on the Hobbes case, and then the most recent case of the Mushroom Man and how it was still unsolved. The main takeaway was that while Freddie was interviewing (her words) Hannibal on campus she had been nearly accosted by one of his colleagues. Hannibal Lecter, the article decided, had a guard dog now, and he was unhinged.

Bedelia sighed, overcome by the implications. This profiler was acting a little too proprietary for her liking, which meant he was probably Hannibal's new crush. How the man went from hating Hannibal to defending him against the paparazzi in only a few months, she didn't know, but Hannibal had his ways. She shivered, remembering how incredibly charming he had been on their first meeting.

She was startled out of her seat by the doorbell ringing, closing her laptop with a snap and tucking it away. She looked at herself in the mirror in the foyer, trying to soften the lines of discomfort on her face before opening the door. She still felt that she looked nervous, which was a dangerous thing around a predator.

"Good afternoon," Hannibal said, smiling as he slipped in when she opened the door.

"Has it been?" she asked, closing the door even as she was tempted to run out of it and into the street. "It's been a while since you contacted me. I was beginning to worry."

Hannibal took his usual seat and watched as Bedelia pulled a bottle of white wine from her drinks fridge and two stemmed glasses from the counter above. There was something running through her, some tinge of fear that was a little more obvious than usual.

“Afraid for me,” he asked, taking the offered glass as she bent close to give it to him, “or of me?”

Bedelia’s stomach clenched as she sat with a grunt, taking a long sip of her wine and weighing her options. “It’s always a little of both, I find.”

Hannibal seemed pleased at that, a small laugh breaking loose as he settled further into his seat. “ *I’m* perfectly safe,” he assured her, letting the knife dig in a bit. “In fact, things are going *quite* well.”

That nearly pulled a reaction from her, and she finished the wine and poured herself some more. “Would you like to elaborate, or are we here to talk about *my* sleepless nights?”

There was a pause, and she looked up to find Hannibal grinning into his glass. There was something slick and hot pulsing just below the surface in that bit of joy that had her shifting in her seat. If there was one thing she knew, it was that things went sideways when Hannibal was enjoying himself, and he hadn’t allowed this level of enjoyment in years.

“I’ve entered into a new relationship,” Hannibal explained. “I find myself fulfilled as of late.”

She wanted to scream, wanted to smash her glass on the floor. Only a tinge of it made its way into her countenance, into the twitch of her left eye. “The FBI profiler.”

“He’s a professor, actually,” Hannibal interjected. “But he does consult on occasion. Freddie called him a profiler; have you been reading TattleCrime again?”

She swallowed and gritted her teeth. “Asking for scrutiny has hardly been your modus operandi, Hannibal. What could this man possibly bring to the table to outweigh that?”

Hannibal seemed to think about it for a moment, eyes going to the windows looking out on the garden. While she had a point, she knew he would be loath to admit it.

“He sees me,” he said at last.

She picked her words carefully, feeling her way around the truth. “He sees a *version* of you, the one you present to the rest of us. No matter how much he enjoys that version, Hannibal, he may not enjoy what’s underneath.”

That caught his attention, and he was leaning forward, eyes glinting.

“What will you do,” she continued, unable to turn back, “if he rejects you?”

“If?” Hannibal replied, mouth twisting into that familiar cruel smile. He *knew* what she knew, and he wouldn’t abide a lie.

“When,” she corrected.

He relaxed at that honesty and sat back again, the dark comedy of it loosening his bones. “We approach problems as they arise. To do otherwise would be foolhardy.”

What about the problems you create for yourself? she wanted to ask, but some things needed to remain unsaid.

The water was clear, swelling between his legs, pulling the line, and Will felt better than he had in weeks. He'd slept well the night before, and the prospect of a long day off and a visit with Beverly had him in the sort of mood to daydream about significance and connections. Everything felt easy, smooth, as he drew his line back and cast it again. Even the ripples in the water seemed to flow more naturally.

"Okay, Graham, you *have* to tell me your secret." Beverly joked, walking into the water to the top of her waders to stand beside him.

Will laughed and took a deep breath, invigorated by her demeanor as always. "What?"

"You look like you've gained ten pounds and aged in reverse," she admitted. "You're making a girl look bad."

Will looked over at her, taking in her shit-eating grin. She didn't look bad, but that had nothing to do with it. "I guess I'm being fed regularly."

"I'd say so. If I had someone cooking for me five days a week I'd marry them. Just sayin'," she replied, casting her own line with ease.

"You never told me you fish," Will redirected.

"You never asked," she replied, shaking her head. "I'm going to die if you don't spill at least a little bit. Come on, Will, you're dating Baltimore's bachelor."

"I'm," Will said, pausing to take a breath before going on, "I'm dating Baltimore's bachelor."

He caught her eye and they burst into a fit of laughter, shaking from it. It peaked and then settled, and Beverly bumped Will affectionately with her shoulder. He drew in a deep breath, eyebrows furrowing, and tried to remember how he got there.

"I take it people who wear sock garters do fuck," she teased.

Will's smile went crooked and he shrugged. "They really do. They do."

They laughed again, and Will worked over his relationship with Hannibal in his mind, trying to see what he could disclose that wouldn't make him sound too besotted.

"He's a pushy fucker," he said. "Not as straightforward as anyone I know."

"And everyone you know is either a shrink or a fed," Beverly elaborated.

"He's both," Will added with a snort.

"How does that even work?" Bev asked. "You never seemed keen on either. Especially psychiatrists. I can't imagine he would dare try to pick you open."

"*Every day* he tries to pick me open," Will countered. "I'm just not that easy to pick."

The second the words were out of his mouth he knew they were a lie. He didn't manage to hold anything back from Hannibal, couldn't seem to stop giving himself away. It hadn't occurred to him until that point what an open book he'd become to the man. There was an unease in that knowledge, but he knew it wouldn't last.

"Has he tried boiling you first?" Beverly quipped.

"He has his ways," Will admitted. "Cooked short ribs for me a few nights ago. Had me pontificating on the garden of Eden."

"Oh yeah?" Bev asked, turning to look him up and down, like she was evaluating him anew. "Which side did you come down on?"

"Knowledge is a hard thing to pass up," Will said, pulling his arm back and casting again. "So I guess I side with the snake."

There was a pause, long enough for Will to look over at Beverly. She was watching him with a look he couldn't quite decipher. Trepidation was too strong a word.

"Dangerous waters there," she finally said, "I think. You're playing against a professional."

Will's nose scrunched up, not really seeing what she was getting at, why she'd suddenly changed her tune. "It's not table tennis," he said, trying for levity. "It's just conversation."

"People pay him $400 an hour for what amounts to *conversation,"* she pressed.

"They'd pay him more if they knew what that mouth could really do."

It was out of Will before he could stop it, a crude implication to cover a darker fear. *What are you giving away? What are you letting him see?* Luckily, it was enough like one of Beverly's jokes that she was laughing it off, relaxing back into the act of fishing. He tried not to think about the $400.

Seduction

Chapter Summary

Hannibal and Will go to the next Ripper scene together.

Chapter Notes

Back early from break with these two getting flirty at a crime scene, can you blame me?

Wednesday morning Hannibal approached Will's car as always, sinking into the seat next to him with that enviable grace. Will was still thinking over his class schedule for that day, sure there would be questions about the papers he had meant to have back by the end of the week. He'd tried grading them, kept the stack with him at all times as though the proximity might disappear his damn brain fog. He couldn't even focus enough to remember what he needed in hand to grade the papers, so it just wasn't getting done.

He took the Tupperware from Hannibal as it was offered and was once again nearly brought to tears over a dish.

"Pain perdu," Hannibal said in smooth French, "or lost bread, was traditionally eaten on feast days, in France. But, I'm sure you know it as an ameritte. Any stale bread, soaked in egg, sweet milk and a little salt. Buttered and fried on a griddle."

Will was making hums of agreement as he ate, each bite perfectly balanced, even after an hour in the car. He was transported to his childhood, staying with the neighbor and her kids while his dad was out on some boat. The only hot breakfast he'd have for the week. He felt small, and his eyes closed to keep whatever inner peace he could still manage. He felt raw. He felt *grateful.*

"Thank you," he managed between bites.

"You were somewhere else before. Where were you, Will?" Hannibal asked.

Will listened to him open the thermos and fill his mug, felt the warmth of the mug as it was pressed into his left hand, and came back online. He drank down some of the coffee, and cleared his throat, eyes blinking open. There was nothing for Hannibal, but the truth. That allowed a type of freedom, he admitted.

"I was with the Ripper."

Hannibal was good enough to simply raise a brow at that and open a second Tupperware to dish out some bacon. Will took a forkful between his teeth, trying to ease out how it would be best to elaborate. He didn't want to go into the lost sleep, into the headaches and the chills.

"The third body will be here any day now," he said instead, looking over at Hannibal and hoping his distress was clear.

"The long days are weighing on you," Hannibal surmised.

"They're gonna call me in, whether I want to come or not," Will added.

"Your first time back at a fresh crime scene will surely be stressful, but you can channel that stress into action, perseverance if necessary," Hannibal decided. He looked over at Will, breathing deeply through his nose, and studied him. "What are you most afraid of?"

Will sighed and let his head fall back, eyes closing. He saw the first and second bodies, rising out of their previous positions to stand gawking at him, suspended. He felt a presence at his side, buzzing.

"I'm afraid it won't tell me anything more about the Ripper," Will said. "That it will just be death."

In between the lines, he was telling Hannibal his worst quality; he didn't fear not catching the Ripper. He wanted to stop him, of course, that was always a part of it, but he wasn't so sure that meant catching him. He hadn't really thought too much about that, though, because he was so afraid he wouldn't *understand.* He was so afraid that he would feel the Ripper kill this next time and somehow be left out of the joke.

And if he was?

If he was, then it would be in front of everyone, everyone and god. Well, everyone and *Jack.*

He wanted this case like he hadn't wanted a case in years, and he felt the pull of some kind of narrative momentum. The murder had surely already happened, and he was just waiting for the curtains to be pulled back; the last stage of the murder was observation. *That,* Will could do. That was what he was put on this earth for, surely. He would bear witness, and that would complete the act.

"You feel like a prophet," Hannibal said, cutting to the quick of him.

"Maybe a false one," Will replied. "I could *easily* be projecting. My mind is full of predictions, how am I supposed to keep them from tainting the picture?"

"Perhaps the predictions are less 'incorrect outcome', and more, color and saturation?" Hannibal asked. "Just because every version in your head can't come to fruition doesn't mean it is false. What sense do these aborted prophecies give you?"

Will's jaw clenched and he swallowed hard. "There's, there's a sense of revelation. He's revealing himself to me."

His voice came out pinched, weak enough to be considered a question. He closed his eyes tight and fought against a growing nausea. It felt suddenly blasphemous to suggest that the Ripper was speaking to him personally. He wanted to take it back, wanted to distance himself from everything in that fucking car, and his hand was on the door handle when the sound came.

Tap. Tap.

Will's eyes shot open and he leaned back as he recognized Jack's face through the car window.

"Sorry to interrupt breakfast," Jack said, over-enunciating each word, "but you need to get to Montgomery County. We've got our third."

It took an hour and a half, with traffic, but Will had agreed to ride with Hannibal, so at least he got some scenery. Hannibal had been blessedly quiet for most of the ride, allowing Will to make arrangements over his phone for his classes and then sit looking out the window trying not to think. He hadn't been sure whether Jack would be upset over Hannibal coming along, but he knew Hannibal would take the brunt of whatever Jack doled out. There was a comfort in that.

As they neared Montgomery County Hannibal pulled off the freeway. He maneuvered through the business district and out to the edge of town, about ten minutes from the metro station, where the scene was located. Brookside Gardens spans 50 acres, including more than ten botanical gardens, multiple sculptures, gazebos and ponds. The gardens are looped by a one mile track, and after parking and calling in, the two men followed a local cop about halfway to a pond with a large square rock path leading to a gazebo.

The cop stilled at the start to the path and waved them along. The anticipation was growing in Will, and though they hadn't spoken since breakfast, he felt Hannibal as a familiar weight beside him as they walked. Soon enough, they spied friendly faces, Jimmy and Brian Zeller in waders, arguing at the edge of the pond, just below a gorgeous maroon maple. The whole gazebo was taped off, and Hannibal held the tape up for Will to slip under as they met Jack under the awning.

"You made it," Jack said, standing over the body, or bodies. "The gazebo and the surrounding seating area were cut off from the rest of the gardens for the last two days, as it was booked out for a wedding until today. The booking was made anonymously. We think the body was placed overnight."

A woman reclined on a bed of ivy and pond grass covered by a crisp white cloth and what looked to be red velvet. She had one arm falling behind her, a dead swan between her thighs, it's beak at her lips. Her left knee was high, right hand on it, and the swan's head rested between her naked breasts.

"Leda," Will acknowledged, circling the erotic scene, taking it in from every angle. He felt the Ripper there with him as a crackle of electricity in the air, the hairs on the back of his neck sticking up.

“Don’t touch the swan!” Jimmy said, coming up next to them. “They can be vectors for antibiotic resistant bacteria, along with geese. We’re testing the water, but the swan might not even be from here, not this time of year.”

Will took a pair of gloves when Jack passed the open box over, and knelt to look at the woman’s face. She was peaceful in death, face relaxed.

“Leda and the Swan,” Zeller said, crossing his arms and standing furthest away, his eyes kept ticking to Hannibal. “Greek myth where Zeus turns into a swan to rape with the Queen of Sparta.”

“Or seduce her,” Jimmy interrupted, watching Will run his finger along the slim braid in the dead woman’s hair. “Really depends on who’s telling the story.”

“This is a Rubens,” Will said, surprising everyone but Hannibal. “Peter Paul Rubens painted Leda and the Swan twice. The second time she reclined on red velvet, and had more intricately styled hair.”

Will closed his eyes, fingers running over the gold hair band above the main braid. He had a sudden rush like a memory, and saw this woman’s hair being brushed and braided with careful attention, curled around the ear. Blush applied high on the cheek. He felt that heady control wash over him, felt the theatre of it. He witnessed barely any of the murder, suffocation probably.

“What do you see, Will?” Jack asked, leaning over him.

“He’s showing off,” Will answered, pushing the body of the swan up to reveal a perfect smile of an incision across the woman’s abdomen. That was where he’d opened her up, accessed the parts of her he’d keep. It was perfectly clean, and Will felt a laugh bubbling up his throat at it.

“He’s always showing off,” Jack replied, frustrated already. “What’s different from last time?”

“Well,” Will tried, a crooked smile making its way onto his face as he tamped down more laughter. “Before he was selfish, removing obstacles to his own ideal. Now he’s, uh, calling himself a god.”

He looked to Hannibal, hoping to find some understanding there. Hannibal simply nodded, pushing Will on.

“There’s some charm in his honesty, isn’t there?” he asked, glancing back up to Jack, then the rest of the group. As usual, he was the only one seemingly holding the thread.

“So he’s the swan?” Jack asked. “He’s Zeus.”

“God of thunder,” Jimmy said. “There are worse comparisons.”

“So he’s going to...what? He’s gonna assault his love interest?” Zeller asked from the corner.

“No,” Will spat, feeling electric. “He’s going to seduce them, and it’s going to ruin their lives.”

Jack was pacing back and forth now, agitation seeming to rise at the same rate as Will’s manic energy. Will couldn’t help it, of course. Now that he had tapped into the Ripper he was high on that clarity.

“That’s how this fits with the other two bodies. A bouquet and a show and a *seduction?”* Jack prompted.

Will finally stood, pulling his gloves off inside out and tucking them in a basket they had out. He ran his hands through his hair, eyes closed as the scene continued to be perfected behind his eyelids. The dead woman, whoever she was, was draped back over velvet with lover’s hands, she was *cradled.* He felt the tenderness of the act, and was choking on it. The Ripper was really showing his prowess, bringing the scene to life with bronzer and rouge. If Zeller was still worried there wasn’t going to be a show, he was missing the one currently playing out.

“The seduction is only part of it,” Will replied. “He’s telling his love interest it won’t be easy to be loved by him. They’ll lose all stability in their life, every relationship they have. Leda is a devastating kind of love story.”

“And here I was thinking the third killing was going to be a chef,” Jimmy said, slightly deflating.

“What does it tell us about the victim?” Jack interrupted. “I get that this is some big conversation between the Ripper and his love interest, but what did this woman do to deserve this?”

“Won’t know until we get her back to the lab,” Will replied, ready to leave the scene and get some fresh air. “We’ll know more when we know what he took from her. Maybe. We should be looking for where the swan came from.”

“Beverly is on her way with the freezer truck,” Jimmy explained.

“That’s all I’ve got for you, Jack. Meet back at Quantico in a few hours?” Will asked, already backing away.

Jack allowed it, though he watched with suspicious eyes, and Hannibal followed Will out of the gazebo and down a path to a squat building holding outdoor toilets. When they were out of sight Will started pacing.

“He’s telling us this is a dangerous pairing,” he gushed, leaning in briefly to catch Hannibal’s eye.

“Zeus and Leda beget Helen of Troy,” Hannibal agreed. “She had a deformed soul.”

“And destroyed an empire,” Will pressed.

“Then these two had better not breed,” Hannibal offered.

Will stilled in his pacing again and looked up at him, smiling as if it were an inside joke. He felt the joy of understanding what the Ripper was saying swell in him and he was giggling, leaning back against the brick wall with a sigh.

“Zeus couldn’t pass up her beauty,” Will noted. “Had to come to her, even in disguise.”

Hannibal took a step towards him and Will felt fire burst over his skin, suddenly aware that they were smiling over a crime scene, tucked away from view. The space between them felt too vast, so he reached for Hannibal’s cuff, pulling him closer still. He felt giddy, in that little bubble.

“The Ripper accepts that his lover can’t, or shouldn’t see him for what he is,” Will murmured. “He’ll come to them, then, in disguise.”

“How does he look, to us?” Hannibal asked, searching Will’s face.

Will thought for a moment, let his eyes close. “He’s normal. He looks like the rest of us. That’s his disguise. He’s like one of those babies you hear about that don’t get enough skin to skin contact. They just kind of fail to thrive. But him, he lives through that first brush with death. Part of him dries up indefinitely, but the rest goes on. Where the branches of morality and empathy lay dormant, he grows new fruit. He has faced death, faced horror, and come out swinging, bathed in clarity of purpose.”

Will felt Hannibal press his body into the wall, the warmth of his breath where his scarf didn’t fully cover his neck.

“What is his purpose?” Hannibal asked, amusement clear in his voice.

“He’s done with dying,” Will explained, breath catching at the press of Hannibal’s lips to his neck. “He wants to live.”

Whatever You Want

Chapter Summary

Hannibal and Will surprisingly have similar reactions to the crime scene. Hannibal takes them somewhere more private.

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes

Hannibal couldn't help himself. Will was recounting his entire life story, flushed with understanding, and he had to hide his face. He kissed along Will's neck, pressed him more firmly into the cement wall, wrapped his arms around him and lifted him momentarily off the ground.

"Jesus," Will huffed. "This isn't the time or place."

He wasn't pushing Hannibal away, wasn't doing anything to stop him, so Hannibal continued. He breathed in against Will's collar, trying to get more of his scent, and growled under his breath. It occurred to him as he did that Will really *was* seeing him, that the analogy had worked, and something in him *tore free.* He found himself pushing harder against Will, bending his knee and pressing into Will's chest with one shoulder. For a blinding moment he saw an alternative future spool out, saw himself *crushing* Will, his ribs giving way and puncturing both lungs, the gurgling sound of blood entering his airways, the pained whine he would let out.

"Just, ouch," Will gasped, taking a handful of Hannibal's hair, "just take me back to the car already."

He was ripped from his dark thoughts by Will's insistence, his fist gripping his hair, scalp stinging. He breathed through the instinct to retaliate and stood back, hands setting his hair and coat back in order. He couldn't look at Will, couldn't risk him seeing something he hadn't planned for, so he nodded once and started on his way back to the path.

Will jogged to catch up, taking up the space next to him and keeping pace as they made it back to the mile track. The air was freezing against his skin, and he let the bite distract him from the sudden inner turmoil. Will seemed not to notice.

"They won't catch him," Will said, nearly vibrating out of his skin. "He won't give us another motive. He'll disappear for another eight months, and there's nothing I can do about that."

He didn't sound upset about the prospect. Instead, he sounded out of breath, and Hannibal reached out a hand and laced their fingers together. Whatever the FBI wanted Will to be, he

continued to be something they couldn't fully appreciate.

"What about the opera?" Hannibal asked. "The FBI will surely be there when the new conductor arrives."

Will shook his head, laughing wryly. "They'll stick somebody in the shit seats, and he'll watch for anything that stands out, but the Ripper looks like us. What are they going to do? Will they interview all first dates?"

"They could interview all surgeons, or past surgeons," Hannibal suggested.

"They'd have to interview you," Will pointed out, squeezing Hannibal's hand.

"I do quite well with interviews," Hannibal admitted, pulling his keys from his pocket and unlocking the car as they approached, its lights flashing once.

"I'm sure you do," Will laughed, rounding the car to get in on the passenger side. "I'm notoriously bad," he said as Hannibal settled in next to him and started up the car. "I don't clock as normal."

Hannibal pulled them out of the parking spot and down a dirt road to the left of the main parking lot. There were signs indicating it was for staff traffic only, and Will oozed anxiety as they made their way down it to park behind a dilapidated greenhouse, off the road. Hannibal had forgotten how strong the compliance instinct was for people like Will. He turned off the car, then the lights, and rested a hand on Will's knee.

"We aren't hurting anyone by parking here. We'll be gone soon enough."

Will huffed out a nervous laugh. "Yeah, yeah, alright."

"Now, come into the back seat with me, I'd like to take back up our conversation," Hannibal said, squeezing Will's knee.

He gave Will a few moments, and sure enough, Will obliged. He did enjoy watching him struggle.

"You're gonna get us picked up for indecency," Will said, pulling the car door closed behind him and sliding to the middle of the back seat.

"Are you saying you want to do something indecent to me, Will," Hannibal teased, hand resting on the back of Will's neck. "Now, you were so uncertain this morning. What changed?"

"Seeing the body," Will hissed. "I was stuck in time, stuck in anticipation this whole week. I felt like, like I was walking in tandem with the Ripper; eating when he ate, sleeping when he slept. I'd be flossing my teeth and he'd feel *superimposed* next to me. Right there at my side, bleeding into me."

"In anticipating the crime scene you imagined his schedule," Hannibal murmured, fingers sliding into the damp hair at the back of Will's neck.

“No!” Will spat, vibrating in his seat. “In anticipating the crime scene, I *felt* him. His patience, as I sat there desperate for him to finish. His *brutality.* I could feel him inside of me.”

“And now?” Hannibal asked.”What do you feel right now?”

Will’s frame shook and Hannibal knew that was the right question.

“I feel his sincerity like a knife to my throat.” Will let his head fall back, unable or unwilling to keep it steady anymore.

Hannibal reached over with his free hand, and ran one finger down the length of Will’s exposed throat. Will whimpered and shook his head left to right, his whole body shivering like he was sitting in a bank of snow.

“I should have *trusted* him,” Will said, face twisting. “Trusted him to finish the sounder the right way.”

“You had a crisis of faith,” Hannibal supplied.

Will nodded and shrugged his shoulders. “Don’t we all, from time to time?”

Hannibal couldn’t help himself, he let his hand rest over Will’s exposed throat, feeling his Adam’s apple bob as he swallowed in surprise. “What will you do,” he asked, watching Will twist like a fish on a line, “when you meet your god? When you meet this Zeus?”

Will gave out a guttural laugh and let his eyes open, looking directly into Hannibal’s as he spoke. Hannibal’s hand tightened instinctively on his throat.

“I’ll eat his heart in the marketplace,” Will concluded, grinning at Hannibal with all his teeth.

Hannibal released his throat to pull Will into his lap, hands going to push his coat down his shoulders, slipping off his scarf and rucking up his shirt. He was desperate to feel Will’s skin.

“Might not be a good practice to have sex after a crime scene,” Will huffed, just as he eagerly pulling Hannibal’s shirt open. “Gonna cross some wires if we aren’t careful.”

“You are the most glorious thing I’ve ever encountered, and I will have you when and how I like,” Hannibal countered, licking up Will’s chest and taking a nipple between his teeth.

“Your narcissism is showing, Doctor,” Will teased, shifting his hips to grind against Hannibal’s cock, where it was hot and hard under all that wool.

“Let them try to stop me,” Hannibal boasted. “It’s been years since someone has even managed to slow me down.”

He reached into the side door, where there was a recess, and pulled out several condoms and a bottle of lube. He pressed them into Will’s hands, raised an eyebrow. The way Will licked his lips and scrambled out of Hannibal’s lap to slip out of his shoes and pants, underwear tossed aside, made Hannibal laugh.

“Go ahead and laugh,” Will said, “but don’t you move a muscle. All this big talk, you’d better be ready to fuck me good and hard.”

Hannibal froze with his pants halfway down and Will climbed back into his lap, grunting as he knocked his knee on the door. Hannibal pulled him down into a kiss as Will rolled a condom onto Hannibal’s cock and pressed slick fingers between his own legs.

“Think I’m gonna let you on top of me after you nearly pushed me through that wall back there? Christ,” Will hissed, writhing in Hannibal’s lap as he tried to focus on relaxing and not coming with his own fingers up his ass. “P-picked me up off the ground. Control freak.”

Hannibal held Will’s hips, mouth hanging open, utterly lost on the man. He couldn’t help the small thrust of his hips, the way his breath came out in a whine. He wanted this torture to last forever, wanted Will to let him inside immediately. He couldn’t decide, and that was enough to have him laughing again. He choked on the laugh as Will gripped his cock and sank down.

“Fucking Hell,” Will gasped, eyes rolled into the back of his head, just the whites showing. “Don’t *fucking* move.”

Hannibal nodded, nose pushing into Will’s armpit and nuzzling him as he got used to the stretch. He was so tight, so hot around him. He would do anything Will asked, *anything.*

“Just,” Will tried, resting his cheek against Hannibal’s as he rolled his hips, “just let me do what I want.”

“Of course,” Hannibal murmured, feeling the heat around him tense and *pull.* “Whatever you want, Will. Whatever you want.”

With that concession, that shift in power, Will sighed and began to ride Hannibal in earnest, grunting on every downslide, panting against Hannibal’s ear. They continued like that, nothing but the sounds of their breathing and a soft growl growing in Hannibal’s throat, for so long Hannibal was shocked when Will spoke. Everything was spiraling towards an end, and he was shaking with want. *Don’t stop, don’t stop.*

“I can’t, I can’t hold out much longer,” Will admitted, small whines growing with every thrust. “Hannibal, I-“

Hannibal wrapped his hand around Will’s cock and rubbed almost painfully at the wet head, Will hissing and drawing back, sinking down in a new angle. Will cried out and sank down again, trying for the same spot and finding it.

“Oh, god!” he moaned. “Oh my god, yes!”

Hannibal tightened his hand and stroked Will faster, thrusting his hips up with the same rhythm, chasing both their releases. Will clamped down around him like a vice and started to come, and Hannibal’s rhythm gave way to a brutal few thrusts as he joined him, chest burning with the effort of holding his breath through it. Will collapsed against him, and Hannibal swore he’d never stop twitching where they met.

“Satisfied?" he asked, his voice rough in the silence between them.

Will let out a small laugh and rubbed his face along Hannibal’s neck, biting down with just a touch of force before pulling away. “For now.”

Hannibal hummed and sucked Will’s release off his fingers, happy as a clam.

Chapter End Notes

looks at you in Much Ado About Nothing: 💦💦💦

I'm listening to WAP right now because of this chapter. There's some whores in this house, indeed.😩❤️🔥👅👁️

His Everything

Chapter Summary

> New information in the Ripper case has Will's subconscious acting up, and Alana finally gets to ask Hannibal about his relationship with Will.

Hannibal pulled the Bentley up next to Will's parked car in the teachers area of the lot at Quantico around noon, putting the car into neutral and letting his hands rest on his thighs.

"You aren't coming in?" Will asked, eagerly wrapping his scarf around his neck and grabbing his bag from between his legs.

"I would love to," Hannibal admitted. "Unfortunately I have patients this afternoon. Feel free to call me after eight, I'll be home by then."

Will nodded, looking around to assess the crowd outside before he leaned in, catching Hannibal's eye. "If not, we have breakfast tomorrow."

Hannibal smiled at him, gentle and indulgent. "We have breakfast tomorrow."

Will's hand skittered over Hannibal's with a quick squeeze, and he was out in the chill. There was a cold rain waiting to fall, and sure enough, as Will made it further onto campus the sky broke open and he was pelted with sheets of freezing rain. He held his hand over his glasses as he jogged a few more steps and got into the hallway, but it was too late, and his glasses were covered in rain and fogging. He cursed under his breath and tried to clean them up a bit as he slipped into the elevator down to the lab.

It only occurred to him as the doors closed and the thing came to life that he hadn't eaten. There was a moment where he thought to complain to Hannibal, as if the man was his stomach's keeper, but he pushed it aside and promised himself he'd get a meal from the cafeteria on the way out.

He was pulled from his thoughts when the elevator doors opened and he could see Beverly gesticulating through the steel and glass divider. She broke out in a smile when she saw him and waved her hand to him, and he quickly entered the main lab to find her speaking to a tech.

"I thought you were on the way to the scene with the freezer truck," he said, leaning against the doorway.

"I sent a tech, it doesn't matter. This is more important. Tell him what you just told me," Beverly instructed, crossing her arms and raising her eyebrows to Will.

The tech looked eagerly at Will and scrolled back through their tablet. “There were traces of mycelia on the first of the three Ripper victims. We’ve run it through, and it matches the Mushroom Man murders.”

Will allowed the casual name to be and chewed that over. “Only that victim, though. He had mushrooms planted all over him, what about cross contamination?”

“He was a pharmacist, Will,” Beverly said. “The victims were put into a state of ketoacidosis before they were planted. We figured he was picking his victims from those who got their insulin from him. He worked at several different local pharmacies. The first Ripper victim is our Mushroom killer.”

Beverly sent the tech away as Will tried to understand what that meant about the Ripper. When they were finally alone, he spoke.

“Do we think it was a rivalry?”

“Baltimore is only big enough for one serial killer? Maybe,” she offered. “But remember this; the Ripper killed this man, Eldon Stammets, eight months from his last kill. *Eight months* after his last sounder, not twelve.”

Will perked up at that, something becoming clearer, though he still had to muddle it out. “He struck four months early. That’s a huge change in schedule. Why would he…”

Beverly smiled at him in a way that said he’d almost gotten it. “What would push a man *so meticulous* out of a well set routine? What was the theme of these murders to begin with?”

“The love interest,” Will supplied. “Stammets’ body was the first declaration of love. It’d be a helluva coincidence if the love interest and Stammets weren’t connected.”

“Exactly,” Beverly gushed. “So...what if Stammets went after this love interest? What if they were the next intended victim? What if, instead of a professional rivalry, the Mushroom Man tread a little too close to the Ripper’s territory?”

“That would explain the castration. What does that tell us about our love interest?” Will asked, more to himself than anyone in the room. “Either they are diabetic, or Stammets knew about their connection to the Ripper.”

“The techs are working out Stammets’ last day,” Beverly said. “They're at his house now, going through his computer. If we can trace him on the day he died, we’ll know the answer to those questions.”

Will fell silent. There was something tugging at the edge of his consciousness. It wasn’t a revelation, per se, but a kind of redirection. He closed his eyes and he was back in the thicket of trees on his property, the place he’d dreamed of. There was that loud crack over his shoulder and he was falling to his knees again, hands on his head.

“You alright?” Beverly asked. “You don’t look so good.”

Will grunted in response, took his glasses off and rubbed a hand over his face, begging the memory to leave him. “Just hungry,” he admitted. “I think I’ll go to the cafeteria and grab something before everyone else makes it back. Do you want anything?”

“Get me a bag of dill pickle chips if they’re still in the vending machine,” Beverly replied, eyeing him carefully.

There was a line for the cafeteria and Will remembered the time with a groan. The thought of having to interact with anyone had him changing directions and going for the vending machine in the hall, resigning himself to a dry turkey sandwich.

He pulled out a few crumpled bills from his wallet and entered the letter-number combo for the bag of chips for Beverly, and collected the chips and his change.

Over his shoulder, the lights at the end of the hall went off with a loud click and a gentle hum, and Will was frozen in space and time. He stood with one hand full of coins, and the other the small potato chip bag, and shook as he heard the darkness coming for him.

Click. hum.

Click. hum.

Click, *click.*

The lights in the whole building were out with the last click, and Will felt someone, *something* approaching. The temperature was dropping, Will’s panicked breath coming out in a white puff. He wanted to turn, wanted to look over his shoulder, but found he couldn’t.

“No,” he whispered, his voice and a low buzz the only sounds in that small space. He registered somewhere that he didn’t even hear the sounds of cutlery and commerce from the cafeteria, couldn’t hear a single soul. *Oh, god, where had everyone gone?*

Slow footsteps came from over his shoulder, drawing closer as Will struggled to see in the darkness, and they weren’t *right.* There was some kind of clipping sound that made them shift between the sound of a man approaching and the sounds of a *beast.*

A horse? *No,* bigger. Shuddering breaths moist in the air, a snuffling that shifted the hair on Will’s head.

Suddenly pressing against his back was a hand made of a thousand needles. *Pain* between Will’s shoulders and everything swam in the darkness, shimmering and revealing the sudden change in surroundings.

Will fell to his knees as the birch trees came into view, and he was shocked to find himself kneeling next to the fly man again. It was night in the thicket, lights coming from his house a

bit away bleeding into the scene. The stars shone brightly above them as Will took in a choking breath.

“What is this?” he asked, hands cupping the back of his head as a loud crack rang out, shaking leaves from the trees.

The buzzing next to him increased and he found he was able to look for the first time. Beside him knelt the beast, the man, the mass of flies that had followed him for months through his dreams. It’s frame stuttered between a man and that of a kneeling male elk, it’s distinctive broad, palmate antlers recreated in startling effect by the horseflies.

Before Will could react, the elk stood, seemingly in reaction to the latest loud crack, and charged, its body a blur as it ran into the night, *towards the sound.*

“Will!”

He came back to himself with a sudden shock, dropping the coins and bag of potato chips on the floor, shaking and scrabbling to his knees to collect them. Jack let out a sigh behind him, and Will cursed under his breath.

“I don’t know what you’re doing down here, but we need you in the lab,” Jack explained, his anger cooling to what sounded closer to pity as Will drew himself up off the ground.

Will looked at his watch, horrified to see a whole hour had passed with him standing in front of the vending machines. He’d sweated through his shirtfront, and he had the gnawing feeling that things were just beginning.

Alana had been looking forward to dinner with Hannibal the whole week, if only to ask about him and Will. They hadn’t talked since Hannibal’s dinner, and although she had heard from a few people at the BAU that he and Will were together, she was awaiting confirmation. After all, when she had been in her masters program there was a rumor *she* was having an affair with Hannibal. He was just the kind of man everyone wanted to talk about.

She arrived at his home right on time, parking out front and walking up the brick path in the light rain. Hannibal had the door open as she made it to the overhang, and held a hand out for her.

“Thanks,” she said, taking his hand and letting him lead her inside. The house smelled amazing, rich with food and the light scent of woodsmoke. “This rain, huh? They say it’s gonna storm overnight.”

“Good thing it’s dry and warm in here,” Hannibal offered, taking Alana’s coat from her and hanging it near the door. “And we have rabbit stew.”

“Aren’t I lucky?” she replied with a smile.

Hannibal got her settled in a seat in front of a roaring fire, and brought her a large bowl of stew, half a loaf of freshly baked bread, and a tall glass of beer. When he finally settled in a

chair opposite, she relaxed and started eating.

“I am but a weary traveler,” she said. “Thankful for your hospitality. Still not sure how you manage to bake your own bread when I can’t seem to remember to use up the produce in my fridge. Do we have the same 24 hours, Hannibal? Or have you made a deal with some deity?”

Hannibal chuckled and raised his glass to that, always thrilled at praise. “I cannot deny,” he began, “that my resources allow for different uses of that time.”

“Different uses?” Alana asked, emboldened by the low lighting and Hannibal’s casual demeanor. “Am I right in assuming some of that time goes towards romancing Will Graham?”

Hannibal grinned back at her, looking more relaxed than she thought she’d ever seen him.

“We split the time,” he teased. “I only romance two to three hours a day. The rest of the time I battle rumors.”

Alana laughed along with him, and took a long sip of her beer. Yes, this was a different Hannibal. That realization pushed her on.

“Never really did see him as a relationship kind of person, but you two seem to have managed to slip into it quite peacefully,” she observed. “After the first fight, of course.”

“The hallway?” Hannibal asked, referring to the morning after his stabbing. “That was simply a misunderstanding. I misspoke and he was understandably upset.”

“Your shoulder was bleeding, Hannibal,” she replied, surprised at Hannibal’s casual take on what had seemed like a big deal at the time. Hell, even after. Will never really spoke to her the same way after that day.

“An open wound will do that,” he replied, not giving an inch.

“It wasn’t bleeding before you went to see him in the hallway,” she countered, for some reason not wanting to give in. “And Will wouldn’t even talk to me about it. He’s acting like I’m an overprotective mother.”

“Only a mother would insist there be no secrets between lovers. Are you really surprised that he doesn’t take well to being mothered by you?” Hannibal asked, smiling knowingly.

Alana nearly choked on her drink. “No, well yes. What do you mean?”

“You had a chance to mother him, and more. You passed that chance up. A man like Will doesn’t allow for second chances. He’s too eager to believe in the first dismissal.”

Alana tried to think of it that way, tried to see from a new perspective her own actions. *Oh.* There it was. She was still acting out the role she’d always taken with him, *but Will had changed.*

“I’m just trying to be his friend,” she said weakly, wrongfooted. “Just trying to be honest.”

“You’re quite honest about your view of Will’s faults. You can’t protect him from life, Alana, by reminding him of his failures. You have to let him make his own choices,” Hannibal explained.

“Who’s mother now?” she replied, a little bitter at how easily Hannibal had pulled apart her behavior, held it against the light.

“I’ll be mother,” Hannibal replied with unsettling confidence. “Mother, lover, keeper, or victim. I’ll take whatever role he needs me to.”

Alana snorted at that, the word victim bringing back the image of Hannibal’s injury bleeding through his shirt. Something about the statement left her uneasy.

“You can’t be his everything, Hannibal,” she said after a long while.

She was answered only by the crackling of the fire, and the knowledge that she was right up against something *dangerous*.

Haunted

Chapter Summary

Will has a rough drive home, and Hannibal drives through the rain to him.

I encourage you to play these songs as loud as you are permitted by your municipal standards, and as often as you like, but at least once.
Songs:
Dahmer Does Hollywood by Amigo the Devil
Devil Woman by Marty Robbins
The Devil Gets His Due by Loretta Lynn

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes

Rain was coming down in such overwhelming quantities as to render Will's windshield wipers impotent. They were pushing water, sure enough, but they couldn't keep up, and the sound they made, that high pitch whine and scrape, was grating on Will like nothing ever had. He opened the bottle of aspirin he had taken to keeping in his jacket pocket lately, and dry swallowed three of them. His head was pounding.

Scrape.

He pulled off the freeway and turned on the radio, anything to cover up the cacophony caused by the wipers. He was twenty minutes from home, ten if the rain let up, and he told himself he could make it that far. The lyrics of the song came through.

'Give or take a few dudes from the bar. Take 'em home with me, this night—-is gonna end horribly-'

His mind lit up with the memory of Jack barking out new information to the crew. It felt like Jack was right there in the car with him.

"Stammets had thousands of log-ins recorded to TattleCrime, and left several messages on the message boards over the years. Freddie Lounds is saying she never spoke to the man, for now at least. They also recovered two phones burned down in a fireplace along with a stack of photos and a pretty melted digital camera," Jack said, speaking from another time. "We still haven't found his car."

Will had felt a flush of nausea when he first heard the connection, thinking Freddie might be the Ripper's love interest. There had been other complaints over that theory in the room, but Zeller had seemed especially affronted. Will was overcome with disgust, and unwilling to

delve further into it. Whatever his ideas of morality might say when it came to worthiness, they surely didn't apply to a situation this wrought.

He hit the button on the radio and felt like he was having a cruel trick played on him when he heard the first crooning notes of 'Devil Woman' by Marty Robbins. Freddie's head appeared in front of him, hovering over the steering wheel. Her long red curls ignited, her face flushing firetruck red.

"Jesus," Will waved his hands around as if to scare the vision off, knocking the car back and forth as he did. "Christ. Christ."

'Devil woman let go of me, and leave me alone,' the radio intoned. ' *I want to go home.'*

"I want to go home, too," Will agreed, panicked and trying to concentrate on anything but the fact that he couldn't seem to focus his eyes.

Drive by feel, he thought. Wasn't that what his dad had said after a few drinks? He tried to keep the car from shaking and squinted to try to get as much focus as he could.

"Stammets had a rifle," Beverly's voice intoned, just over his shoulder as if she were in the car.

"A rifle," Will repeated, speaking to the air, and his better angels. "A rifle."

Crack.

"Stammets' victim was surely drugged," Jimmy's ghost said, picking his nails in Will's passenger seat. "They might not even remember having a run-in. Unless, of course, they noticed the injection site."

Injection site

Injection site

Injection site

Three times the words rang in his mind. *Like in a fairy tale,* he thought. *God save me from what I might summon.* The skin inside his elbow was itching, and he had one hand off the wheel scratching at it, pulling at the cuff of his shirt, and he got too close to the ditch and jolted back. He fought to keep the car on the dirt road.

"What's wrong with the Devil falling in love with you?" a voice Will *almost* recognized as his own said suddenly. "Didn't he save us from this killer? Can we so easily refuse his love?"

The words on the radio came through again, another song from his childhood. He felt every possible version of himself throughout the years plastered uncomfortably on top of him, like

he was looking out through a thousand eyes at once.

'Well, your little playhouse is sittin' on sticks of dynamite,

and I get mad tonight and light the fuse.

If you come in and find out that my dog bites,

you'll know the devil's here collectin' dues,' Loretta Lynn sang through the car.

There was something coming for him all along, he thought. God, he was *always* headed here. He felt the damnation he'd always felt flow through him, doubled by that of his thirteen year old self, his nine year old self, his every essence. This was the man of flies, this was the trajectory of his life. Fill your brain full of dangerous men and pretty soon one will show up on your doorstep. Or two.

Will's whole body was shaking and he caught the edge of the ditch again. His knee hit the radio and the words rang out loudly, distorted by the accidental change in volume.

'I am capable of making you disappear.

I am the agent that decides your fate.'

He slammed on the brakes, putting the car into neutral and turning it off as fast as he could. The sudden silence amid the roaring rain was a shock. He pulled the keys out of the ignition as if they were hot as fire, and tossed them out the car door, staggering to his feet.

The rain. *The rain.*

He slammed the car door shut and stumbled out into the night. Ahead, like a beacon, his house lights shone through the rain. He jogged the last few hundred yards up his drive in the pouring rain, found the hide-a-key he'd just purchased and let the front door slam open so the dogs could join him on the porch.

"Go pee," he said, "go pee."

He walked through the front door and felt like his tempo was off. It was as though he was walking through waist deep water, pushing through time like there was a barrier from one second to the next. There was a buzzing in his ears as he stripped down, out of his sopping wet clothes and shivered uncontrollably as he got in the shower.

He could still hear the rain outside, loud as hell coming through the open front door, but as the water started to warm another sound took over his consciousness. He swore he could hear a scratching, a gentle whine, coming from the shower wall. As his body stopped shaking from the cold, he leaned in to try to hear it better.

Scratch.

One moment and it was over, his surroundings opening up again as he took in the sounds of the dogs moving nervously through the house, the pouring rain, the click of the gutter doing its best to keep up.

After feeding the dogs and eating a few slices of bread with butter, Will climbed under the covers with his phone and a bottle of whiskey. He opened it and took a long swig, then dialed Hannibal's number.

"Will." Hannibal's voice was warm through the phone, and Will felt himself choke on a sob.

"Yeah, hey," he replied, realizing too late that he had nothing planned to say. He just wanted to hear Hannibal's voice.

There was a pause on the other side of the line, a shifting of fabric, and Hannibal seemed closer. "You sound distressed. Have you made it home?"

"Barely," Will admitted, a chill going through him as he remembered that he'd have to find his keys in the morning. "But yeah."

"Something has happened," Hannibal surmised. "Can you tell me what it is, Will?"

No.

No, he thought, I can't fucking tell you what it is. The thought of Hannibal knowing that the Ripper was wooing *him,* that the monster saw Will as a *possible mate,* tore him up inside. Because surely, the Ripper could see something in him that no one else could. Something dark, some terrible part of his soul.

"I feel like something is bleeding to death inside of me," he said, the symptom instead of the cause.

There was another long pause, and Will drank down the whiskey to stop himself from crying out.

"I will come to you," Hannibal said, voice low and insistent. "Stay where you are."

"My car's blocking the road," Will spat, unnerved by the thought of Hannibal seeing how fully he had fallen apart. "And the rain is really-"

"Nothing will stop me from coming to you," Hannibal replied. "Nothing."

Will nodded his head, tears falling from his eyes at last. He struggled to try to feel grounded by Hannibal's surety.

"Soon, my dear," Hannibal murmured. "Rest now."

Will let the phone fall from his hand at the dial tone.

The change in Will's demeanor had Hannibal searching his mind for reasons, and it was a long drive, so he had the time. Perhaps it was the illness acting up, and Will would have to finally get looked at. Or, perhaps something happened at work.

Before, when Will had kept things to himself, had answered questions with more questions, had obfuscated, Hannibal had been fine. Then, he had believed they had all the time in the world. Now, he felt that time closing in around him like a vice. It was only a matter of time before Will found out who he really was, only a matter of time until he would have to act in his own best interest, instead of *theirs.*

He wanted to call Jack, let the phone call pull him from whatever comfort he was enjoying, wanted to ask what had changed. It was more important, though, he knew, to keep quiet. If things started to go sideways, if they started to look in his direction, he could still shift gears.

He could see two paths ahead of him. One in which they never catch the Ripper, and the other in which he is forced to give the FBI a stand-in. It occurred to him, maybe for the first time, that Will might not endure confinement.

"Jack," he blurted. The call was impulsive, unavoidable.

"Hannibal," Jack replied, the tone of his voice it's own question.

"I was just wondering if there have been any updates. In the other cases we're working. I don't want the Ripper to overshadow them." Hannibal was relieved when it didn't sound like so much of a fumble.

"You don't usually reach out by phone," Jack replied.

Damn. Nothing for it, then.

"Will seems to be in a good amount of distress," he admitted after a moment. "Nothing else has changed. I assume something happened at work."

Jack took in a loud breath before he replied. "You'd do better just asking me next time. But, yes, we've got a new finding in the Ripper case. I was going to update you in the morning, because it's your case."

Obvious. It was obvious to Hannibal now. The thing that broke Will into those little pieces, the thing bleeding out in his belly. *He knew.*

"The Mushroom Man was one Eldon Stammets. You were right about him being a pharmacist, so thank you for that," Jack continued. "He's also our first Ripper victim. Will seemed unsettled by that revelation."

Hannibal hummed, to keep Jack talking, and exceeded the speed limit by another five miles per hour.

"The crew are speculating over whether or not the Mushroom Man, this Stammets, went after the Ripper's love interest," Jack added. There was a break, a long silence where Jack seemed

to be thinking something over. “Look, I can’t ask you to offer your services to Will in any professional way-“ he started.

“No,” Hannibal agreed, seeing where Jack was going, why his voice was turning soft through the receiver.

“And we both know you two should really be doing a relationship disclosure,” Jack pressed. “But if I could ask you for something, as a friend.”

Hannibal swallowed hard. “Of course, Jack.”

“Look after him for me, yeah?” Jack said. “He’s doing that zoned out stuff outside of crime scenes now. He just, he seems spooked. I’m not saying psychoanalyze him, I’m just saying-“

“I will be the canary, Jack,” Hannibal agreed. “You will know from me first, should things become untenable.”

Jack let out a long sigh, seemingly relieved. “Thank you, Hannibal,” he said. “That’s all I want. Just an, an early warning system.”

“I would appreciate the same from you,” Hannibal replied.

Jack laughed a little in concession. “Alright, alright. Next time he leaves looking haunted, I’ll give you a heads up.”

“Do you see how beneficial we can be for each other, Jack?” Hannibal pressed. “If only we are forthright.”

“A lesson you keep trying to teach me, Doctor,” Jack allowed, graciously. “Goodnight, Hannibal.”

Hannibal said his goodbyes and hung up the phone, car pulling off the freeway and heading towards the private road Will lived off of. He felt at least a little bit bolstered with the strengthened alliance, and focused on what he knew.

One: Eldon Stammets had been identified. His connection to the Ripper was cemented.

Two: Will knew that Eldon Stammets went after the Ripper’s love interest. Will’s lost time lined up with that of Stammets’ disappearance.

Three: Will was distressed, his voice small through the phone, weak. He spoke of bleeding.

Conclusion: Will took the knowledge that he was Stammets’ intended victim, thus the Ripper’s love interest, as a wound. Something was bleeding out inside him, and Hannibal had put it there.

Hannibal felt a sick thrill roll through him, even as the possibility of rejection raised its *bloody head.*

Chapter End Notes

If you come in and find out that my dog bites, am I right???

Lucky

Chapter Summary

Hannibal strives to give Will a new perspective.

Chapter Notes

I just realized this is the last chapter of the year! Good fucking riddance too bad fucking luck, and may our cups runneth over. Cheers to 30 more chapters in the new year, cheers to continuing on our path! I hope all of you have a safe, if not peaceful, transition into the new year.

This story has been my greatest accomplishment of the year, and it's pulling me out of hibernation by the throat, and I'm thrilled to continue to share it with you!

See the end of the chapter for more notes

There was a moment, right after the front door flew open, that Will felt he'd finally slipped through the bounds of reality and into a horror movie. He was sitting up in bed, an empty whiskey bottle clutched in his hands, and Hannibal nearly took up the entire door frame. He was bathed in shadow, his face fully concealed, and Will was shocked at how menacing he looked.

"Oh, fuck," Will murmured, overwhelmed and suddenly very sorry he asked Hannibal to come. He felt so small and stupid.

Hannibal walked into the dark room, only lighting coming from the front porch and the glow of the space heater, and set down two bags to greet the dogs.

"Do they need to go out?" he asked Will, hands petting over the dogs heads as they took turns.

"Yeah," Will replied, realizing he'd probably fallen asleep for the hour Hannibal had been on the road, going by the bad taste in his mouth.

He watched Hannibal go back to the front porch, along with the dogs, and climbed out of bed to go brush his teeth. He cursed under his breath as getting up jolted his head and a spike of pain ran through it. He tossed the empty liquor bottle in the small trash in the bathroom and looked at himself in the mirror. He looked like shit; eyes bloodshot and hair sticking up. He tried on a smile, and it quickly turned into a grimace.

He was rinsing his mouth when Hannibal arrived at his side, hesitating before running a hand down Will's back.

"Might not want to touch me," Will said, jerking away from the movement. "I'm covered in sweat."

Hannibal left his hand high on Will's back, pressed between his shoulder blades. It felt like he was making a point, but Will's body responded without his permission by ducking his head and relaxing, hands braced on the cold ceramic sink lip.

"If you will remember," Hannibal said, speaking low in the quiet space between them, "not long ago we had a conversation about my personal medicine cabinet."

Will tried to remember, tried to focus on that simple command. Heat sparked in him as his brain made the connection. He remembered the call, how obvious he'd been in retrospect. His cheeks were heating up, and his throat was clogged with something, so he just nodded.

"Good," Hannibal replied, taking a deep breath before continuing. "I have with me a personal blend. Perspective in a bottle, if you will. And the offer of a physician-led adjustment."

Will noticed the fact that Hannibal strategically didn't say the word psychiatry. It lit up in his consciousness like a neon sign, but he couldn't read it. An offer? *A disguise?*

"You're not my doctor," Will said, his voice seeming to come out just above his left ear. Was he shrinking? "Not like I could afford you, anyways."

He was striking out, but he wasn't sure *what at.* Hannibal tilted his head and caught his eyes through the mirror. And there it was; another adjustment. Was Hannibal trying to put him at ease, taking away the option of bare eye contact, or was it another shield. Why did it feel like Hannibal was *hiding himself from him?*

"The human mind is used to short spikes in anxiety, not the prolonged duress your body has you under. I'm only trying to offer you a temporary way out. Think of it as an escape, just south of whiskey territory," Hannibal said, his face still irritatingly neutral.

"And you'll what? Talk me through the trip?" Will asked, not even sure he could believe his own words.

"I'll join you, from the shore," Hannibal said.

Will thought over the alternative, talking to Hannibal about his new symptoms in the state he was in. It was like asking if he wanted to go through it with or without 3-D glasses, and he found the absurdity bubble out in a laugh.

"You sure you don't just want to get me high?" he teased, voice coming out tight, wrong somehow.

"Human desire is more than even two fold," Hannibal replied. "Not that I would say it's outside the bounds of influence."

Will didn't follow, his brain stumbling over Hannibal's words, the end of his buzz leaving him hollowed out and slow. "You said you had the good stuff," he said, trying for flirty. "Impress me, I guess."

"In that case, I'll excuse myself to the kitchen," Hannibal replied, finally pulling away. "What was the last thing you ate?"

Will was still stewing in absurdism, and found his tongue already loosening, against his will. "Toast al dente."

Hannibal simply shook his head, smiling at Will fondly, and left. Will felt like his strings had been cut, and sank to his knees in the bathroom. He tried to put together a to-do list, thinking that he could get his body to move if he could just give it clearer instructions. He felt like he was hardly breathing.

"Can the dogs have a snack?" Hannibal asked, voice raised to bridge the distance.

Will's body started to shake, and all his apprehension, all his suspicion was gone, shedding like a second skin. He felt raw against the comfort of Hannibal's familiarity with his life, his willingness to think of Will's dogs, the times he'd been in that kitchen cooking. So suspicious. God, Will felt like an idiot.

"Yeah," he shouted. "Thanks Hannibal."

If Will had been offered psilocybin by a friend's boyfriend, or at a party, or god-forbid by his own psychiatrist, he would have said no. He had a shaky enough relationship with reality on its own, he would have explained. But this wasn't some guy, this was Hannibal, feeding Will dinner and asking if Will trusted him. It would have taken a lot on a good day to not perform his particular role.

"I don't feel good," Will said, looking up at Hannibal, in the chair on the other side of the room, just far enough for his face to fall into shadow. He realized then that the room was lit by a fire, his vision swelling at the edges, doubling the size of the flames. There were logs stacked up next to the fireplace too, enough to keep the fire going all night.

Will tried to imagine Hannibal walking through the rain from his car with the logs, but his brain wouldn't listen. It must have happened, though, at some point. Now he was sitting across the way, cobalt blue suit jacket unbuttoned at the waist, black tie staring at Will with ten different paisley magenta eyes. Will shook his head slowly.

"It won't last. Allow the experience to ground you in your body," Hannibal said, voice booming, warping in Will's ears. "Discomfort is nothing to run from, just an indicator to take note of. Tell me what else you feel."

"I feel," Will tried, searching his brain for the right word. "I feel lucky." He laughed, amazed to find it was true. "Lucky to be alive."

“You called me in distress today,” Hannibal replied. “Are things getting more dangerous at work, Will? What is the new risk?”

“We’re getting closer to the Ripper,” Will said, flashes of the fly man rolling past him, floating away like smoke in the wind. “That will put the love interest in harm’s way.”

“This person could be walking through their life, unaware of the love the Ripper has for them,” Hannibal supplied, his voice echoing around Will.

Love. Love. Truly.

“We think he killed someone who was going to hurt the love interest,” Will added, not feeling sick anymore. Without the pain, the somatic disturbance, it sounded romantic.

“He is a killer, first and foremost,” Hannibal affirmed.

“What is that person supposed to do with that information? How do you fold that into your sense of self? That you’re loved by a monster?”

“He’s a monster now?” Hannibal asked, the firelight dancing up to his chin, threatening to show his expression. His tie blinked.

Will felt every curl of the flame as a masterpiece of nature’s beauty. Patterns spilled out, every lick of the flame destined since the first days of life on this planet. Everything was in its place, and Will felt his guard, his barriers from the world falling down around him. There was a sense of relief in it.

“Is it better to be loved by a monster, or a god?” Will asked. “Who’s really to say? The outcomes seem equally damned from this distance.”

“How is the distance working for you?” Hannibal asked, uncrossing and crossing his legs.

“It’s a salve to an open wound. I can focus on things besides the pain,” Will admitted, head lolling on his neck.

“Pain. You mentioned something bleeding to death,” Hannibal replied. “Can you see it now, the cause of the bleeding?”

“Cupid’s arrow,” Will said, eyes going down to his own chest, the long stem of the golden arrow glowing where it was buried between his ribs. His chest bloomed as he watched, bleeding hearts growing and bobbing and dying away as time seemed to spin on and on, eating away at his ribs.

“What do you see, Will?” Hannibal pressed, his voice coming shockingly from over Will’s shoulder.

“Destiny. I was always going to be his victim,” Will said, sure of it then. “Monsters and Kings alike love a mirror.”

“You do more than reflect the Ripper, you offer him understanding. You are more than just what your mind can conjure. You have a heart, a soul.”

“I should be terrified,” Will replied, closing his eyes as the fire started to turn into fireworks in front of his eyes.

“But you aren’t,” Hannibal agreed.

Will’s eyes blinked open, focused on the empty chair across from him. He felt another shock at Hannibal’s breath on his neck.

“Tell me why, Will,” Hannibal continued. “Unburden yourself of the truth.”

“I guess I never properly learned to run for cover,” Will said, eyes falling closed as Hannibal knelt to add another log to the fire. The dogs in his peripheral view shifted as if on fast-forward, and Hannibal was back in his seat, hands clasped on one knee.

“You must decide for yourself what you do next,” Hannibal said, voice sure, commanding. “If it is your destiny, there can be no wrong choices.”

Will thought about that, the room swirling into darkness. He found himself under the covers, tucked into bed. *Perfect,* he thought.

“Sleep well,” Hannibal murmured, just to his left. “I will be here when you wake.”

“I believe you,” Will whispered, words running together. “You’re th-only thing I can depend on, these days.”

He thought he heard a sound from Hannibal, but before he could question it he was asleep.

Chapter End Notes

Don't try this at home

The Plan

Chapter Summary

Hannibal looks at how things are unfurling, and comes up with a plan.

A quarter past three Hannibal pulled himself out of the chair next to Will's bed and maneuvered around the dogs to add a few more pieces of wood to the fire. The rain was still loud outside, coming down in buckets, and he paused at the window to look out.

"You're still here," Will's voice came, quiet, questioning, possibly in awe.

"Where else would I go?" Hannibal asked, afraid to turn and give anything away.

That was fine enough, because Will proceeded to get up and use the bathroom, allowing Hannibal to settle back into his chair before he returned. There was so much up in the air, and it was all happening too soon. He wanted more time with Will before he saw the truth. The man Hannibal had been pretending to be was at the edge of dismemberment, or possibly just some sort of hibernation. Either way, change hung in the air, thick and pungent.

"Come to bed," Will murmured, back from the bathroom and climbing under the covers, sliding over to make room.

A voice in Hannibal's head was laughing at him. He could have kept this Will forever, soft and accepting, if only his nature was different. He very rarely felt regret, but the knowledge that things would change left him greedy for the way things had been. *Premature nostalgia?* One more night, he told himself, one more gentle night before the storm.

He undressed down to his boxers, folding all his clothes and stacking them on the chair, and then joined Will in bed. The edge was freezing, but as he moved closer he settled into the spot Will had been keeping warm for hours. Will wrapped his arms around him and heated him further, and Hannibal allowed himself to relax.

"Have you been up this whole time?" Will asked, resting his face against Hannibal's bare chest, letting his eyes close.

"Plenty to think about," Hannibal agreed.

Will's body stiffened slightly, and Hannibal ran a calming hand down his shoulders, rucking up the hem of his shirt and pressing into his damp lower back.

"It's dangerous," Will concluded with a sigh, "to be around me. I'm worried I've pulled you into some terrible alternate reality."

It was almost beautiful how wrong Will was. Starkly innocent. Hannibal sought out his mouth, kissed him slowly, just to get him to *be quiet.* He couldn't help how good it felt, just as he couldn't help how blind Will's self-delusion made him. Everything was flowing just slightly off course.

As much as Will had grown confident in the last few months, Hannibal knew he still thought he was the cause of so much suffering. Instead of relishing it, Hannibal found himself feeling *irritated.*

Perhaps it was a miscalculation. He'd been attracted to Will in the beginning because his self doubt was a built-in pair of blinders. Hannibal was able to get close to Will without much of a fight, and that was what he wanted, initially. It was enough for weeks, to just have that blooming intimacy. Now that he had become accustomed to it, he wanted something different. He wanted Will's transformation.

"I came here on my own," Hannibal whispered, breathing against Will's parted lips. "I won't leave unless you tell me to."

That did something to Will and he grunted and shifted in Hannibal's arms, pressing his scorching body closer. They were kissing again, slow, hot, drawn out and Hannibal was growing desperate. Will wrapped one leg over his left thigh and rolled his hips, prick growing hard against his skin.

"What if I'm damned?" Will gasped, looking up into Hannibal's eyes like they held all the answers in the world.

The insinuation that the Ripper's love was the thing that pointed towards Will's damnation stung, but Hannibal pushed on. He could show Will that damnation was just a richer tapestry than the rest, a tighter weave, but he would get there on his own, and he had been warned.

"If you are damned, I will walk with you to the fires of hell," Hannibal assured him, ducking in to kiss up his neck. "I fear no devil, no saint."

"Real life isn't as simple as devils and saints," Will argued, rolling on top of Hannibal, his knees bracketing Hannibal's larger thighs.

Hannibal held his breath, watched as Will moved on top of him, bathed in golden firelight. Will shifted upwards, eyes on his own hard cock where it stood between his legs. He lifted his right knee, let his hands run up Hannibal's sides, and then leaned down to press them together. His cock rubbed up the side of Hannibal's through his boxers and the heat between them was almost unbearable. Hannibal scrambled to push his boxers down, to release his cock from their confines. He needed more of Will's skin.

"My destruction could just as easily be mundane. Pain, drawn out for years," Will murmured, mouth hot against Hannibal's neck.

An extended engagement, Hannibal thought, warming to the idea. "You will still need to be fed," he insisted, gripping Will's hips and letting him set the pace. Dragging, dragging up and

down his body. No relief in sight. His hips twitched, but he wouldn't thrust. Not yet. "You will still need to be cared for. Mundanity can warm into routine."

He couldn't believe himself. He was offering Will something he would never be able to back up, and he knew it. What madness was love, to have him promising such impossibilities?

"I don't want you to get hurt," Will insisted.

Hannibal's reply was stolen from his chest by the way Will gripped their cocks in one hand and rolled his hips. He pushed the wet heads through the circle of his fist, kissing Hannibal's neck and breathing against him.

I don't want you to get hurt.

The phrase rang over and over in Hannibal's head as his arousal took over. It tasted off in his mouth, it wasn't honest. Will was happy enough to hurt Hannibal himself, he just didn't want anyone else to. *Possessive, destructive.* A flash of what Will could become washed over Hannibal and his eyes closed as he started to orgasm, hips thrusting of their own accord.

A plan formed as Hannibal drifted close to sleep. It was obvious what he had to do, now that he really thought about it. Step one, which he would work on the next day, was to get a gun in Will's hands.

Will had faced attack once before, and chosen not to take the shot. As far as Hannibal was concerned, that was where they had to start. Will was stuck in a role he had chosen for himself decades ago, and as long as he continued to see himself as the victim, his transformation would be on hold.

Will needed a second chance at righteous violence, and Hannibal would be happy to arrange a meeting. Whatever killer they were presented with next would provide good first blood. All Will needed to kill was his protective impulse and a weapon. Hannibal thought how natural a knife would be, held tightly in Will's grip, but that was too personal for now. Will needed to be able to point and have it be over, he needed the opportunity to take it all the way, right upfront. Nothing would do but a pistol.

The next morning came without much fanfare. Will woke just before sunrise, extricated himself from Hannibal's warm embrace, and walked out into a dry morning. The dogs were thrilled to be able to piss without the rain coming down on them, and ran and jumped like they'd endured a month of confinement. Will followed them out between the trees, cursing the drop in temperature as he did.

By the time all the dogs had run their legs out and waited to get their paws somewhat cleaned at the door, Hannibal was up and cooking. The smells drew Will into the kitchen before he could convince himself to shower, and he sat at the counter to watch Hannibal cook.

"Did you sleep well?" Hannibal asked, flipping some pancakes at the same time as he diced an onion.

“Both times,” Will agreed. “I feel,” he paused, scanning his body for something out of place, “good. Just, um, good.”

Hannibal set down his spatula and stepped around the counter to run his fingers through Will’s hair. He looked Will over and nodded once before going back to the stove.

“Reduction In negative affect should be felt in the coming weeks. Up to a month. You might find yourself more comfortable with eye contact,” Hannibal explained, looking up at the end to catch Will’s eye.

Will nodded, unsure where he stood on that, but willing to give it a try. He couldn’t help giggling when he found he could hold Hannibal’s gaze a bit longer than usual. He was either losing his mind completely, or it really was the good stuff.

“Pancakes, an omelette, and potato hash,” Hannibal offered, plating Will up and passing the food over.

Will took the plates, and the hot sauce, and scooted over one stool so Hannibal could sit next to him. The sun was just beginning to peek through the trees, and it felt close to a Norman Rockwell moment. Hannibal took the hint, and soon enough they were eating side by side, sharing the same breath.

“This is damn good,” Will gushed, hungrier than he had been in months. Everything tasted amazing, and he found himself skipping back and forth between dishes just to taste.

Hannibal smiled smugly, and kissed Will’s bicep, right below his sleeve.

“Have you decided yet how you’ll approach Jack today?” Hannibal asked, bringing Will’s mind back to the night before, the wracking understanding.

Will sighed and thought about it while he chewed. He had a few options, but nothing seemed as urgent in the growing light of day. He took the offered cup of black coffee from Hannibal and drank some down.

“I will be playing the caution card, I think,” he decided. “I could be the love interest, or it could be Freddie. Hell, it could be anyone at this point, and I’m choosing to not rush things. I’ll deal with it when they find his car. Until then, I’ll just keep my ears peeled.”

Hannibal hummed and drank his own cup of coffee, the quiet pause surprisingly not pulling any anxiety from Will.

“I will respect your caution,” Hannibal said at last. “If you will allow me one suggestion.”

Will wasn’t expecting that. “Sure,” he allowed, curious.

“Renew your weapons license,” Hannibal said, all perfected calm.

Will thought back. He’d done all the requisite training over the summer, and had filled his hours at the shooting range. It wouldn’t take much to get a weapon again, as he was on an

open case. He thought of all the statistics, all the times he'd been glad he didn't have a handgun in his house, but brushed them aside.

"It'll make you feel better?" he asked, resting his hand on Hannibal's, amazed the man was even still there.

"You need more than a rifle, I think," Hannibal replied. "It worries me that you're out here all alone. If need be, the neighbors are still farther than walking distance."

"Yeah, okay," Will allowed, picking Hannibal's hand up and kissing across his knuckles. "I'll get my gun back. Happy?"

Hannibal simply nodded and watched Will until he went back to eating, looking pleased.

Caution

Chapter Summary

Everything starts to fall in all around Will, and he finds a surprising ally.

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes

About a half hour after Hannibal had left, Will found himself searching the waterlogged debris in the ditch with a flashlight, looking for his keys. He was focused on the task, so much so that he jumped when his phone went off in his back pocket. The flashlight caught the edge of the reflector on Will's keychain, a little down the way in some leaf litter.

He ignored his phone and found a good stick, walking closer to the edge to catch his keys with it, tussle them out. His phone buzzed again and he cursed and picked the leaves and muck off the keys. Just as he was about to check who was texting, Beverly was calling. He answered right away.

"You gotta come in through the back," Beverly said, sounding out of breath. "Park in the back lot, take the back road. No joke. We have press everywhere."

"Seriously?" Will asked, grunting as he stood. "What's-"

"Look, I wanted to tell you in person," Beverly explained. "There here because of you, Will. You're the Ripper's love interest. I'm sorry."

And that was caution to the wind.

"You there?" Beverly asked.

"Yeah, I'll be in soon," he replied.

The day rushed by in a flash of interactions. Will was passed between enough professionals that by the end he couldn't seem to remember them individually.

There were the bunch that wanted to remind him that his safety was their top priority. They were always ready with the worst case scenario, hostage situation, kidnapping plot. They took up half the day, but assured him that they'd move his weapon's request along on the fast track.

Then there were the bunch that wanted him to 'do his job'. Not his teaching position, of course, that was always the back burner, but his investigation position. His re-enactments, his

clarity, they wanted him to point it all suddenly inward.

"What about yourself do you think the Ripper is focused on?"

"When was the first time you consulted on a Ripper case?"

"What do you think Eldon Stammets wanted with you?"

"Where were you the evening Eldon Stammets disappeared?"

It turned a bit maddening at the end, starting to feel a little too much like an interrogation, and Will was relieved when Alana stepped in on his behalf.

"If you don't finish this up, I'll start papers for overtime for everyone in this room," she threatened.

The higher-ups started complaining and Will was excused within minutes, rushing out the door to find Alana leaning against his car.

"You saved my ass," he said, smiling up at her in what he hoped would register as genuine gratitude. "They would have had me in there till sun up."

"Well," Alana surmised, "you can't catch the bastard on no sleep."

"I was trying to tell them," Will replied.

"Look, Will," she said, clearly struggling. "I've been way to cautious with you-"

That fucking word, Will thought.

"And I know it's come across all wrong. I just want you to know I'm in your corner," Alana finished.

Will was struck by how sincere she sounded, and wondered what kind of conversations she'd been having about him, and her *approach.* It made him feel slightly queasy, but he *was* grateful for the help.

"Thank you," he said, hoping it was enough.

"And I promised Hannibal I'd take you to dinner tonight," she continued, her smile saying she hoped Will wouldn't say no. "He couldn't get a hold of you when you were in there with the big boss. Jack took him out of town, looking into a possible family annihilator."

"So he asked you to make sure I ate," Will said, feeling the warmth of the gesture fill him so much he had to turn away.

"Yup," she replied, hesitantly cheerful.

"Fine," Will said, "but we're going to a waffle place."

When their pancakes, eggs, and sausages had been delivered, and they were forgotten for a while in the back corner of the restaurant, Will found himself relaxing a bit. He almost remembered how he'd enjoyed Alana's presence in the past. It was close enough to back to normal to press his luck.

"What was Hannibal like when you first met?" he asked, feeling like a teenager asking after a crush. "I know there was a whole other him that I never got to see."

Alana chewed and looked up to the ceiling, apparently trying to conjure a younger Hannibal in her mind.

"He was stunning," she said, still thinking. "I mean, he's definitely something now, but back when he was a surgeon he was breathtaking."

Will laughed and continued to eat.

"He was so talented, so unreal that the younger doctors called him the Robot. Each incision was perfect, each stitch an exact match. There was just something maddening about him."

"He's maddening now, so I could see that," Will allowed, trying to imagine a more exacting Hannibal, forfeiting instead.

"He was so entitled, but then you'd see his work and," Alana sighed and threw her hands up. "I mean, you can't argue with genius, you know?"

"So you knew him before psychiatry," Will realized aloud.

"Yeah," Alana agreed. "He was working on getting his license, and teaching. All while taking shifts in the ER. I told him that if he didn't get his things in order, he was going to run that little motorcycle of his off the road at some point and lose it all."

Will snorted. He knew Hannibal had given up being a surgeon years ago, but the man had never given away what a seemingly tumultuous time it had been.

"A reckless streak?" Will asked, struggling to imagine a Hannibal that wasn't always in control.

"Oh yeah," Alana agreed, pouring them both another cup of decaf. "He managed to pull back just in time. He got offered a teaching job at John's Hopkins, and that's how he ended up my mentor. He gave up the bike that semester too, haven't seen it since."

"You two never?" Will asked, finally asking the question he'd been thinking about for months.

Alana relaxed in her seat with a small laugh. "No, he was already having an affair. Not that I don't think he's," she faltered. "Not that I wasn't attracted to him."

Will smiled to himself and went back to eating. For some scared little thing inside him, it felt like a win.

“He is very attentive with you” Alana said at last, getting the waitress with a wave of her hand.

It occurred to Will as they were finally parting in the lot out front, that he had been waiting for some outside force to reassure him that what was going on between him and Hannibal was real. He still wasn’t sure what that meant.

On the drive home Will received a couple texts from Beverly, letting him know Freddie had dropped a new article. He thanked her, and tried to brace himself for the worst.

Bracing himself for the worst involved two fingers of whiskey and three logs in the fire once he was home. He was grateful for the stack of firewood Hannibal had left on the porch, and reminded himself to make sure the fireplace was cleaned in the next week. It wouldn’t do to smoke the place up.

When he was finally seated in his chair, toes pointed towards the fire, he pulled TattleCrime up on his tablet.

Will Graham, the front page of the blog declared, in large red letters. **What makes this angry little man irresistible?**

His previous words echoed in his mind. *You’re pissing me off.*

There was an action set of photos of him gesticulating in the middle, altered to black and white, and three names in stylized hearts around him; Eldon Stammets, The Chesapeake Ripper, and Hannibal Lecter. Will read through the article, which suggested that something about the way Will was able to empathize with serial killers made him some kind of siren .

It seems Baltimore’s most dangerous men, and one famed psychiatrist, have something in common; Will Graham. You may not have heard of him before, but everyone from the head of Baltimore’s State Hospital for the Criminally Insane to the men destined to be sent there are marveling at Graham’s way of thinking.

“He can not only empathize with the Everyman, but can sink into the mind of the psychotic with great ease. The Mushroom Man killer was surely looking for that level of understanding when he went after Graham,” Dr Fredrick Chilton surmised. “It was bad luck, it seems, as our very own Chesapeake Ripper had already taken a shine to Graham.”

Chilton, head of the BSHCI, says he’s spoken to Graham on occasion.

“It’s actually quite beautiful watching him work,” Chilton explained. “You can see him shed his humanity, if you look closely enough.”

It was such distasteful conjecture that Will found himself turning the tablet over and resting his head in his hands. Fredrick fucking Chilton had never seen him 'work', and after this, he never would. Just one more peer who decided Will was a sideshow freak, *perfect.* The waters around him seemed muddy, and he wasn't sure where he stood.

He tossed the tablet aside, and reached into his pocket to grab his phone, sure Hannibal must be settling into some hotel room somewhere just then.

A wave of fear washed over Will, embedding a deep sadness in him, and he shook with it, sure he would never truly be understood. "Definitely damned," he murmured to himself, finding Hannibal's cell number and starting a call.

Hannibal's voice came through the phone like molasses, slow and deep and comforting. All he managed to say was Will's name before he was cut off by Will sobbing into the mic. Will caught himself, rested the phone against his thigh for a moment, and tried again.

"Hi, Hannibal," he said, voice tight, eyes stinging.

"No easy days ahead, I take it," Hannibal replied.

"Hmm. No," Will agreed. "Not for a while I think."

"Are you home?" Hannibal asked, a shifting of fabric suggesting movement.

"Yes," Will replied. "And they've got two guys sitting on my property. I felt like Jack was sending you away as punishment, so I'd have to do this alone but I couldn't be alone if I wanted to."

"You aren't alone," Hannibal assured him. "I'm just a phone call away. Did you let Alana take you out to dinner?"

"Yeah," Will said, sinking back into the chair and closing his eyes. "We got pancakes."

"See, not alone," Hannibal pressed. "And now, I'm here on the phone with you."

Will hummed and nodded, letting Hannibal's voice soothe him as if he were in the room. "You're not busy though?"

There was a pause then Hannibal's voice came through louder than before. "Not busy in the least. I just finished writing up my report for the day, I'm having some wine, and my tie is off for the day. Tell me what I can do for you, Will."

Will imagined Hannibal sitting on whatever overstuffed chair his hotel room provided, wine glass in hand, focused only on him.

"Just, could you just pretend it's a normal day?" Will stuttered out, overcome by the command in Hannibal's voice.

"Of course, darling," Hannibal replied, pushing Will deeper. "I received a call from Jack midday telling me there was a crime scene he needed me on. I was aware you were in

meetings all day. It was difficult to leave town without speaking to you."

"I miss you," Will blurted. "I mean, the distance drags on me."

"I miss you too," Hannibal replied. "Now, what next? A whole family slain, I'm afraid."

"Jesus," Will cursed.

"All in their places at the dining table, one seat open," Hannibal added.

"The father," Will said, sure of it.

"The son," Hannibal corrected. "Nine years old. Missing for ten months, but still accounted for in the plating."

"That's young. Bullet trajectory?" Will asked, picturing the dining table in his head, a nine year old boy, bloodshed.

"All over, I'm afraid. At least two shooters, one short enough to be a child, another the height of a woman or adolescent," Hannibal explained. "Bullets are being accounted for and analyzed as we speak."

"The lost boy made a friend," Will said, voice soft at the end.

"Perhaps," Hannibal said. "You sound forlorn at the mention of friendship, and it reminds me how little you speak of your childhood. Did you have trouble making friends, Will?"

Will stretched and poured himself some more whiskey. "Yeah, well. Had to follow my dad around, shipyard to shipyard. Hard to make friends when you're always the new kid, and what's the point when you know you're just gonna leave?"

"Do you find it easier, now that you're settled?" Hannibal asked.

Will snorted out a bit of air, eyebrows knit, and realized he'd never thought of himself like that before; settled. He'd owned the house he lived in for seven years by then, but he still had yet to empty out the previous owner's things from the second floor. It shocked him that he hadn't noticed how temporary everything felt, how gossamer.

"I don't know if I'm settled," Will admitted, throat tight. "I think I might just be waiting out a storm."

The other end of the line was quiet long enough for Will to hold his phone away from his face to check he hadn't been disconnected.

"If you had to run," Hannibal said finally, a spark running up Will's spine, "what would you miss most?"

"The river," Will sighed. "When everything is shit, when it all gets too fucking loud, I can take the dogs to the river. Nature will surprise you with optimism, if you let it."

“In that case,” Hannibal said, taking in a long breath. “I prescribe you a day at the river. Should I tell Jack you’ll be off limits this weekend?”

“I thought he was up there with you? Do you think he’ll hassle me over the phone while you’re right in front of him?” Will teased.

“You’re absolutely right,” Hannibal replied quickly. “I’ll just have to be on my worst behavior, and take up all his time.”

Will laughed at that, imagining Hannibal on his worst behavior. Hannibal would insist on malicious compliance, if anything.

“Don’t you go winding Jack up,” Will warned. “He’s still gotta come back to the BAU at some point.”

“I will defer to your preference,” Hannibal replied smoothly. “Now, I think it’s best we both get some sleep.”

Will grumbled a bit, but recognized the day weighing on him. “Yeah, alright. Plus I have to figure out breakfast for myself tomorrow,”

“You will take care to treat yourself gently this week, won’t you?” Hannibal asked, his voice suddenly seeming so far away.

Will felt that old sob making its way up his throat, and nodded in agreement. He whispered *yes* through the phone and let it rest against his chest when he finally hung up, sure it held some of Hannibal’s warmth.

Chapter End Notes

Me, gesturing to Chilton as he is interviewed in the other room by Freddie: 🔪🍗💀😐💉🩸🗡️🍽️

Turmoil

Chapter Summary

Everything goes to shit.

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes

The next morning Will agreed to the carpool with his security team. He figured that if he wasn't going to sit and eat with Hannibal, he didn't really have to bring his own car. It did mean he had to listen in on their conversations, though, and attempt to meet them partway.

"My wife already has all the decorations up," the driver said, continuing with Will's least favorite small talk topic. "We've got two Christmas trees up this year, one all white. I wired the lights so they pulse with whatever music is on."

"I need you over at my place," the blond guard replied. "My husband can't find the broken bulb to replace it, so the whole tree is dark. The kids are getting anxious."

"How about you, Mr. Graham?" The brunette guard asked, sealing Will's fate. "How are you celebrating the holidays this year?"

"I'm not really sure," Will admitted, feeling the usual fear of being ostracized spread out in his stomach.

"You aren't single, are you?" the driver asked.

"Naw, he's dating that doctor," the blond guard corrected. "The one from the news. You two never have a dull day, huh?"

Will tried to smile and shrugged. "Not lately, at least," he admitted.

Everyone seemed to find that a hard bridge to cross conversationally, and Will was allowed a bit of quiet for the rest of the ride. He was grateful.

There were reporters at the gate onto the back road when they finally made it to Quantico, and Will ducked his head to avoid the flash photography. It had been a good choice to get a ride, after all. They didn't have any more trouble on the road up, but Will still felt the thump of his heart in his hands, his face.

He scrambled to get out of the car, pacing about in the parking lot for a minute before piling into the elevator with the three guards, headed to the lab. He was thrilled when the guards

decided it was better to be in a room with a coffee maker than a room with a dead body, and filtered out to find the lounge. Now, he just had to face his colleagues.

“Will,” Beverly greeted, looking up from the body of the Ripper’s last victim. “Glad to see you’re here.”

“We’re just looking back over the body again,” Jimmy said. “Oh, and the swan was from out of state. Some breeding program thought they were sending it to the Maryland Zoo.”

Will slipped on a pair of nitrile gloves and moved to stand over the body on the opposite side as Beverly, watching her hands. She was running a fine tooth comb through the victim’s pubic hair

“Do you remember getting kidnapped?” Zeller asked, throwing the whole room into chaos.

“Fuck sake,” Beverly spat, eyes going wide. “We talked about this, Brian.”

Zeller threw his hands up and sputtered. “I just think he should tell us, if there is something he knows. How do you forget getting kidnapped? You have to remember something!”

“We know he was drugged, Brian, really. Stop being such a drama queen,” Jimmy replied.

“Drama queen?” Zeller spat, shock evident on his face. “It’s not just drama if it’s relevant to the case! Will is essentially evidence, and I just don’t-“

Beverly was almost shouting then, but her voice and the voices of the other’s were drowned out in Will’s mind by crashing waves. The room swayed in his periphery as he focused more closely on the abdomen of the body on the table. Something about the almost mechanically perfect placements of the stitches was pulling at Will. Some siren rang off in the distance as his fingers brushed the edge of the smile the Ripper had given the woman.

She’d been relieved of her stomach and intestines, he was there when she had been opened, but then she was sewn back up. He hadn’t noticed it before, how precise the stitching was. He looked between her skin and the braids in her hair, and had a sense memory of being struck by how perfect they were, how delicate. His eyes closed and he saw the Ripper's hands again, brushing the hair, parting it and braiding it, curling with exacting detail.

Those hands.

He saw the hands stitching next, in his mind’s eye. In, across, out and back. The practiced movements, the understanding of the materials, something was staring Will right in the eye.

“Do you have any idea who the Robot is?” Zeller asked, breaking through Will’s thoughts.

The Robot. The Robot.

“What?” Will demanded, suddenly right back in the booth of the waffle place, listening to Alana speak.

“Each incision was perfect, each stitch an exact match,” Alana’s memory said.

“Do you know who the Ripper is?” Zeller demanded, angry at the seeming subterfuge.

“I need to, um,” Will tried, turning and walking to a dark corner of the room.

He could hear them still arguing behind him as he sank to his knees and tucked his head into his chest, but his breath was loud enough in his ears soon enough to block it out.

The rest of the day went by in a flash, thanks probably to the disassociation Will was suffering. He barely took in his work hours, and was soon stuck in the back of his security’s car listening to Christmas music.

“All I want for Christmas,” Mariah Carrey sang.

All I want is to disappear, Will thought. He was thrashing back and forth internally over the possibility that he was sleeping with a killer. Christ, and what a pathetic phrase for something so much more insidious.

If it was true, if Hannibal really was the Ripper, Will was lost. He was more than just dating Hannibal, he realized with dawning terror, he was *in love* with him. Against all better judgment, against his every instinct, Hannibal had wormed his way in and Will *had let him.*

He thought back to their conversation the night before. Hannibal had asked him what he would miss if he had to run. Stupid, pathetic, oblivious. *Had to run?* Who on earth would ask a question like that? Why, if not to plan for some escape?

You could run away together, a tiny voice inside Will offered. *You could make sure he is never caught. You could keep him.*

Will bit the inside of his cheek to keep from crying and rested his face against the cool of the car window, thankful for the dark. He’d fucked up before, hell, he’d even fucked up on the job before, but this one blew it out of the water. Had he really been so blind as to not catch any of the signs, or was everything distorted now, was he losing his mind and his instincts along with it?

There was no one he could talk to about it either. That kind of accusation would ruin someone’s career if it wasn’t true. The waves from that misfire would be felt for years, would touch everything from the FBI, to the society page, to all of Maryland.

And if it was true?

“Alright boss,” the driver said, pulling up to Will’s house and putting the car in neutral. “Next shift will be here to take our place in an hour. Until then, we’ll be right out here.”

Will thanked them and jogged up the path, fumbling with his keys before finally opening the door. The dogs rushed out past him, more interested in the guards in the car than relieving themselves. Will let them run around and left the screen door propped open with a chair as he made a beeline to the shower.

He was covered in layers of dried sweat, his skin giving off the peculiar scent of pico de gallo. He closed the bathroom door and shoved the hamper up against it, stripping as quickly as he could and getting in under the hot spray of water. He couldn't focus until he was *clean.*

He scrubbed his whole body, scrabbling and dropping the soap a few times. He felt manic, strung out and twitchy. His skin burned where he scrubbed it, the scent of the soap finally taking over. He needed to be clean. If not in mind, he thought, at least in form

When he felt a bit more like himself he rinsed off and dried himself, then slipped on a robe and moved the hamper out of the way to go get the dogs.

Buster was back inside, doing a little dance by the closet that held the kibble and Will reached down to pick him up as he passed. He buried his nose in the dog's fur and walked out onto the porch to call to the rest.

"Dinner, guys. Who's hungry? Who's hungry?" Will called out, shocked by how normal his voice sounded to his own ear. Shouldn't it be cracked, shouldn't everything about him be disintegrating?

He rested Buster on the floor after he closed the front door and went about filling all the dog bowls with kibble. He felt bad about not having the focus to feed them anything better and searched around in the closet for a bag of treats. What he found instead was a paper bag full of rabbit jerky and dried chicken esophagus Hannibal had made for them. He opened the bag carefully, feeling for some reason like he was about to find a live snake in it. When it all looked alright he cursed under his breath and passed the lot out, breaking it up and sprinkling bits in everyone's bowls.

That surely was something in Hannibal's corner, wasn't it? He liked animals, really liked Will's dogs. He wasn't pretending, Will had seen the way he interacted with them. Would a serial killer, especially one of that magnitude, really buck the trend so hard?

It was driving Will crazy how his mind didn't seem to agree. He swore he had reason to care about Hannibal, he thought he was a *good man.*

And when a good man gets to killing? his mind supplied.

He ignored it, brushed the whole ordeal off and went into the kitchen to get something for dinner. He found he was exhausted, so much so that he balked at the idea of waiting for a frozen dinner to heat and found himself grabbing a can of Hormel tamales and a water glass.

He filled the glass with whiskey and took a long pull off it before opening the can and grabbing a fork. He'd forgotten that each of the six sad tamales was wrapped in wax paper and cursed under his breath at his choice as he pulled a slippery square of paper out between forefinger and thumb and let it slap into the sink, wet with oil.

Things got easier as he drank, or at least he cared less. He tried not to compare it to a home cooked meal and found himself chanting the word no under his breath. *No. No, no, no.* He did not need to grieve another thing.

He was drunk, solidly drunk by the time he fell into bed. The room spinned and he closed his eyes, wishing he'd shut off the lights before laying down.

"Winston," Will whined, tossing his glasses aside and throwing an arm over his eyes. "Get the lights, buddy. Turn the fucking lights off, would you?"

The dog was at his elbow, licking the residual oil from his fingers in no time, and the lights remained reliably on. Will cursed and threw one of his shoes at the light switch. He got it with the second shoe and collapsed back against his pillow. Just then, his phone rang.

"Yellow," he said as he answered, an old joke between himself and his dad.

"Drinking already?" asked Hannibal, his voice so proper through the phone that Will wanted to throw it.

"Had a shit day at work," Will replied, unable to censor himself. "Fucking hate everything so there's nothing for it. Ate dinner over the sink too, you gonna give me shit about that?"

There was a pause on the other line that let Will know he'd said all that out loud. If Hannibal was a killer, Will wasn't doing so well at protecting himself.

"I don't believe I've ever disparaged your eating habits," Hannibal said at last. "As long as you're eating."

Will buried his face in his pillow and let out a scream. He wanted Hannibal to be mean to him, to show him he was a monster, and not the kind man he'd pretended to be all along. He wanted to fight him, wanted him close enough to *hit.*

"Yeah, well, you're not my mom, so," he said, stubbornly deflecting.

There was a pause, and a shuffle of fabric, and Hannibal was back. "As far as I can tell, no one is your mother, Will. Care to talk about that?"

Will was blown away, Hannibal had never used such lazy psychiatry on him before. It was so obvious as to be slap in the face.

"Do I want to talk to you about the fact that I never knew my mother?" Will asked, seething. "No, I don't think so. What about your mother, Doctor Lecter? Why don't we talk about her?"

Why don't you ask me why I'm mad? he wanted to say.

"I lost my mother when I was quite young. Her and my father. My only sister followed not long after," Hannibal replied.

"You're an orphan," Will murmured, brain going in a million directions at once.

"I was. I lived in an orphanage until my sixteenth birthday, when I was taken in by an uncle of mine," Hannibal explained, not a trace of emotion in his words.

“I’m sorry,” Will said, not sure if he meant about Hannibal’s loss or about his own attitude. He was starting to forget why he was so upset. Everything was spinning.

“I’m sorry as well,” Hannibal murmured, “about your day, and your mother.”

“Long closed wound,” Will admitted.

“I apologize for picking at it,” Hannibal replied. “Would you like to tell me what’s gone wrong?”

“I can’t,” Will cried.

And that, that was the worst of it, wasn’t it? Not that Hannibal might be a monster, but that he was the only person Will wanted to talk to about it. He was desperate for counsel, and the person he was closest to could be his enemy.

Or protector, a voice interjected, the one that sounded so much like himself.

“In that case,” Hannibal said. “How would you like me to tell you about my day?”

Will felt himself slipping away, felt everything he knew about who he was and what he wanted dissolving in front of him.

“Yes,” he whispered into the receiver, “please. Please.”

So, Hannibal acted as if nothing was wrong, speaking to Will gently until he fell asleep.

Chapter End Notes

> Shaking and crying and throwing up on my keyboard. Smashing and screaming and shrieking into the night. Who did this to us???

A Will Graham Problem

Chapter Summary

WIll thinks he's finally got it figured out, and Beverly thinks otherwise.

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes

Beverly caught Will right after his first class, pulling him by the shirtsleeve into an empty classroom. Will had a talk with the security team and they agreed to wait outside, giving him and Bev some privacy.

"You look like shit," Beverly said fondly, once the door was closed.

"Thanks," Will chuckled, uneasy. "I feel like shit too."

Beverly directed him over to some seats near the long window and Will settled in for what he was sure was meant to be a heart to heart.

"I wanted to get you alone," she explained, "so I could check on you. I'm worried about you, little bro."

Will threw his hands up in the air, frustration breaking through. "I'm worried about me, too!"

"Have you seen somebody about the sleepwalking?" she asked, catching him completely off guard.

"What? No. I have, I have an appointment in a couple of weeks," he sputtered. "Is that what you're worried about?"

"Yeah, I mean you are being courted by a serial killer, and that's...I'm not sure yet what that is, but my point is, I don't want to see you break. That's a lot of stress on top of a medical issue. And we barely talk anymore," she added, brows furrowing.

"Bev," Will tried, unsure how to fix it.

"What? It's true. I get that you've got Hannibal now, but I miss you. And I have to tell you that, in case," she added, faltering at the end and looking away.

"In case something happens to me," Will said, finishing the sentence for her.

"Yeah," she said, voice soft. "That."

Will took off his glasses and rubbed his face with the palms of his hands, trying to find direction. He wanted to explain to her that it was so much worse than she thought. He wanted to tell her the truth about Hannibal, as he was coming to see it, but that would put her in danger.

Something about that realization shot anger, hot through his veins. It was impetus enough for him to get out of his wallowing and allow him to take on a new perspective.

“Screw this,” he said, slipping his glasses back on and looking Beverly in the eye. “Fuck the Ripper.”

Beverly smiled weakly at him, confused by his change in demeanor.

Will let all of the self pity he’d been feeling shift inside him, let the growing anger push him on.

“This egomaniacal asshole thinks he can just ruin my life because he likes me?” Will asked. “I call bullshit. I’m his fucking problem now. He’s already given us more evidence to go on in these last months than in the years before. He fucked up, and he’s going to continue to fuck up. And what are we going to do?”

“I have literally no idea,” Beverly replied, giggling now, nervously.

“We’re gonna be there when he fucks up again,” Will explained, a plan forming in his head. “That’s how we catch the Ripper; we use live bait.”

His words rang out in the room, a feeling of solemnity in duty taking their place, and the two sat in silence.

Beverly waited, alone, in that empty classroom for several minutes after Will left, composing herself. She had no choice but to raise a flag. Will Graham was not okay.

She walked quickly down the hall, head bowed, and closed the door behind herself when she found Jack's office was empty. She went and sat in his chair, pulling up his cell number on her phone and calling him.

“Please tell me you have a reason for interrupting my break,” Jack said, voice gruff through the phone.

“We have a Will Graham problem,” she said.

“A new one? I personally have a stack of Will Graham problems,” Jack replied.

“There’s something wrong with Will,” she elaborated. “He’s sleepwalking, dissociating at work, and now he’s convinced he can lure the Ripper to him. I don’t know, Jack, but something isn’t right, and I think we both know where this is headed.”

“What would you suggest I do?” Jack blustered. “I’ve got everyone I can on the Ripper. You know we’re spread thin with these family murders. I can’t watch him if I’m offsite.”

“I’m not saying he needs a babysitter, I'm saying he needs a doctor. Consider this my official first complaint,” she replied, leaning back in Jack’s chair and looking up at the ceiling.

“Don’t give me more work. Send it to me as an email. I’ll put in the forms for a psych eval,” Jack said. “Then maybe I can get some fucking sleep.”

“Thank you, Jack,” she said, relieved.

“I’m just covering my own ass. This isn’t a favor,” Jack replied, his words at odds with his playful tone. “When you’re right, you’re right.”

“I might get that on a hat,” she replied, grinning in spite of it all.

“Yeah, yeah. Now go away, I’m eating,” Jack said.

“Sure, boss,” she allowed, hanging up the phone and holding it to her chest. Psych eval was a first step, and it was way too late to be playing quick and loose with Will’s head.

That afternoon Will got a text message alert from the armory that he had a check out time for a service pistol. It was still two hours away, though, and he had a class to teach. He settled in at the desk in the middle of the room, the same desk he’d stood at that first day Hannibal had been on campus. The students filed in slowly, and he let his mind wander.

He wondered again at the insistence from Hannibal that he arm himself. It was another frustrating contradiction. Hannibal suggested the gun, for protection. He had killed someone who tried to hurt Will, but that could simply have been a pissing contest. Will now saw himself as Hannibal’s current obsession, so of course Hannibal would protect him for now. It was the after Will was worried about. What happened when the shine wore off, when Will plunged a spear into the chest of the beast?

He thought back to trying to convince Hannibal that the Ripper wouldn’t get caught. Felt a spike of anger in Hannibal’s confident response to getting questioned. That bastard had let him rhapsodize for hours about the Ripper, the whole time pretending to be a neutral observer.

He told you the truth. He showed you the future, your future.

Will was struggling to keep his inner monologue from taking sides, and it was speaking up for Hannibal more and more. He needed to right his ship, needed to bleed Hannibal out of his system. He looked to the future and wondered when he’d ever manage it.

“Okay people, I have your essays,” he spoke to the class of students. “A week late, but I’m sure you all understand why.”

The group grumbled in unison and Will let himself focus on the give and take of teaching a class. There was nothing he could do now, but lie in wait. If he had drawn the Ripper to him by being himself once, he could do it again. He would slip back into the comfortable movements of his regular life, let the man come to him, reveal himself again.

Hours later, the gun accompanied him out of campus, a familiar weight at his side. For good or for bad, he wasn't going to go down easy.

Chapter End Notes

Beverly: dude you should see a doctor, there's something not right with you and I'm hella worried.

Will: you're totally right, I'm looking at this the wrong way! I'm the thorn in the Ripper's side, get it? He wants a game, well I'll give him a fight, the fight of his life!

Beverly: 😮😦😐😑

Risky

Chapter Summary

> Will calls Hannibal after letting things cool for a few days, and prods at his seams. Hannibal works on his plan, moving to the next stage.

"I've been thinking about Leda."

Hannibal picked up the phone at ten minutes to eight PM, surprised to find Will was calling him. He was sure that something had changed, sure that Will was on to him. His prediction that Will would distance himself had lasted a paltry three days.

"Have you, now?" Hannibal asked, mind going back to his latest kill, to the ferocious way he and Will had coupled at the crime scene.

"The version that the Ripper picked," Will continued, apparently not going to mention the time since they last spoke, "the Rubens, was based off of Michelangelo's sketches. There is a sensuality that he makes his own, giving Leda softer lines."

"Michelangelo did tend to paint his women quite masculine," Hannibal agreed, wondering where on earth Will was headed.

"Boucher didn't shy away from painting the feminine form," Will replied. "Even explicitly."

It pulled a sharp intake of breath from Hannibal, and he paused. He had a feeling his copy of Francois Boucher's 1740 Leda and the Swan would be brought up, seeing as it was displayed in his dining room, but now that it was, he didn't know what to say.

"There was quite a lot off talk in the 1600s around whether or not it was profane to depict a woman having sex with an animal," Will continued.

"The insistence was that it was less profane than depicting a woman and man having sex," Hannibal clarified, on steadier ground. "The idea of the profane has followed Leda ever since. In 2012 in London, an art house was made to remove their depiction of Leda and the Swan. It was held under a ban on violent pornography."

"Neither Rubens or Boucher seemed to depict violence," Will replied. "Their Ledas were relaxed, satiated in their intimacy."

Hannibal swallowed hard, all the things he wanted to tell Will were collecting in his throat. His instinct to delve deeper might be his end.

"Leda is often depicted as a willing participant," he agreed.

He wanted to ask Will if *he* was still a willing participant, if he'd changed his mind with all this new information. It was an itch under his skin, a growing agitation. He wanted to ask when his own heart might be had, in which marketplace he would soon be devoured.

"Have you seen Poliphilo's wood carvings?" he asked instead.

There was a sigh, a subtle shift on the line.

"No, I, I don't think so," Will admitted.

"Leda and the Swan recline on the roof of a cart, copulating for all to see. It's often described as a triumphal procession. Love, sex, the desire to be one with that which is sacred and holy; out in the open," Hannibal explained.

"Risky," Will replied. "We keep such taboos behind doors for a reason."

Hannibal was fraying at his edges. What was Will saying? Was Will *flirting,* and if so, was it with him or the Ripper? Did Will still see any distinction? How much of this was a tease meant to ferret him out?

"I miss you," Hannibal blurted, unable to keep the thought to himself.

There was an adjustment on the other side of the line, a pause that pulled at Hannibal's entire being.

"You were supposed to come home today," Will said.

And there, gorgeous. It wasn't a wholehearted rejection.

"There's been another family killed," Hannibal explained. "I might be here for the next week."

"A week," Will said, apparently doing his own calculations.

"I've been meaning to ask you," Hannibal admitted, heart in his throat. "The end of the year is coming up quickly. Would you join me for Christmas? I'll make us dinner on Christmas Eve and you can spend the night."

"Christmas?" Will asked, voice going tight. "I don't usually, I don't-"

"It would mean a great deal to me," Hannibal interrupted, finding it was true as he said it aloud. "I don't usually celebrate either, besides the varying work parties."

"Just us?" Will asked, seeming so very far away.

"You and I," Hannibal affirmed. "As I said, it would mean a great deal to me."

"Okay," Will replied. "I can do that."

"Will?" Hannibal asked, unable to stop himself.

“Yes?”

“Your company is the only thing that matters to me,” Hannibal admitted. “Do you understand what I’m telling you?”

Will let out a huff of breath, and Hannibal wished he could see him, wished he could take in his honest response.

“I'm not really sure” Will said, voice soft, confused.

“Say the word,” Hannibal assured him. “I’ll give you anything you want.”

Jingle Bell, Jingle Bell, Jingle Bell Rock!

If Will had to hear this song one more time he would fucking crack. He rolled the window down, just to get some air, unable to touch the radio to turn the damn thing off since it wasn’t his car.

“Tanner wants this new electric skateboard,” the driver explained to the whole car. “I told my wife it sounded dangerous. Didn’t those things catch on fire?”

Will grimaced.

“That was like a decade ago. I’m sure they aren’t still catching on fire,” a guard argued. “Just make sure he wears a helmet. There was a boy in Chelsea’s class that got a brain injury when-“

Will thought he was going to *scream.* He couldn’t handle another day of Christmas music, another day of uninspired small talk.

Say the word, Hannibal’s memory supplied.

Will imagined echoed screams and had to blink away of a vision of an alternate timeline where the security guards all died in a shootout. The crunch of bone and scent of blood weren’t a complete surprise. He shook it off and took a few aspirin. Hannibal’s solutions, no matter the problem, weren’t viable. The fact that he had to keep reminding himself of that had Will worried.

The other thing that had him worried was the dream he’d had the night before. He stared out the window and let himself remember it in parts.

He had been sitting on the front porch, Hannibal at his side. They were talking, but everything seemed slightly out of sync, the dialogue overlapping.

“I feel like you’re going to-“

“I’d like to have you-“

“-eat me whole.”

"-right here."

Hannibal on his knees between Will's legs. In the dream Will was wearing a white shirt and nothing else, pulling it up and spreading his legs lewdly. Leda. Leda. *Leda.*

It was a frustratingly good blow job, Hannibal letting him fuck up into his throat when he wanted, but it didn't stay that way long. Hannibal shifted, his entire being replaced by the fly-man. Every touch felt like pins and needles and Will had woken up to find he'd fallen asleep on his arm. It was almost the perfect level of anti-climax for the way his life was going. Frustrating, but not deadly.

He was tempted to call Hannibal and demand phone sex, if only because it felt like Hannibal had really visited him in the dream. He wanted to curse at him through the phone, tell him to finish what he'd started.

"You okay?" one of the new guards asked, alerting Will to the fact that they'd made it to their destination.

"No," Will said, punctuating it with a bitter smile, and grabbed his work bag. He couldn't get out of the car fast enough.

Jack was pacing in front of a wall of photos, each depicting one of the thirteen victims, at their place of death. He was vibrating with tension.

"So we have two families now, destroyed by this group," he said, voice grave.

The seven or so field agents in the crowd didn't say anything. Most of them were still getting acquainted with the case, and Jack for that matter. Hannibal let the rest of the briefing flow over him, trying to see where he could insert Will.

It was clear that there was only one more family to go. Mothers killed last; this was a woman out to destroy her new children's past lives to solidify their belonging to her. Hannibal could understand her motives, so he could use them to his end. All that he had to do was get Will on-site before they found her.

It would be a sort of adjusted Minnesota Shrike; where instead of Hannibal killing the one cop and Hobbes, Will would kill this would-be mother. He didn't doubt Will would be willing to do it, especially with children involved, he just wasn't sure yet how to frame it for Jack. And, speak of the devil.

"Do you have a second?"

Hannibal nodded, getting from the plastic chair and following Jack down the hall to his makeshift office. He closed the door behind himself and sat in the chair facing the desk.

"What can I do for you, Jack?" he asked.

"I'm worried about Will," Jack said. "Someone at the lab made a complaint a few days ago. Now, I'm not gonna say who, and I'm not gonna say what it said, but I'm gonna ask you,

what am I missing?"

"Will is under a great deal of stress," Hannibal replied, trying to gauge how bad it was by how upset Jack looked. "On his best days, he can be erratic."

"But should I be worried?" Jack asked.

"He was perfectly lucid when we spoke on the phone last night," Hannibal assured him, seeing his opening. "But we could use another hand on this case. I think we're closing in on her, Jack. If Will were here, you could observe him for yourself. You could make a more informed decision."

Jack seemed to think that over. "Not like the Ripper case is going anywhere. I'd have to move some funds around to allow for transit."

"I have plenty of extra miles on my card, if that's all that's staying your hand," Hannibal offered. "I could easily have a flight booked by this afternoon."

"Easy," Jack said, looking a bit suspicious. "I guess. Alright, I'll put it through, but you two can't share a hotel room. You haven't disclosed your relationship yet, and we can't have anyone looking too close."

Hannibal just shrugged to show he would allow it.

"Disclosure," Jack said. "That's what I want from you two for Christmas, okay? It's three sheets of paper, front and back. Practically nothing."

"I will make sure that's arranged," Hannibal said, unsure just how long the 'relationship' would continue, after the new year.

"Okay," Jack replied, already picking up his work phone and dialing. "Not get out of here, I have some calls to make."

Fate

Chapter Summary

Will gets on a plane and heads to North Carolina. For a case, for Hannibal, for fate.

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes

Will shouldered his travel bag, making his way through a throng of holiday travelers to the right terminal. He'd checked in and received his gate number, and had ten minutes to kill before boarding, so he pulled out his cell and called Hannibal.

"Why am I getting on a plane to North Carolina?" Will asked, blurting it out the second the call went through.

"We've tracked the killers via a security camera in a convenience store. We are working on identifying the final boy as we speak. He will lead us to her," Hannibal answered, sounding as professional as always.

Will sighed, took a seat on one of the plastic chairs facing the full wall windows, and focused his eyes on the moving planes. He took a steadying breath, and responded as calmly as he could.

"So you're not gonna tell me?" he asked, more of a statement than a question really.

"Will," Hannibal objected.

"No, that's the reason on the request, I want the *real* reason," Will replied, temper short. "But, you can't tell the truth right now, can you? At least not to me."

There was a long moment where all Will could hear was his own breathing. He wondered if he was about to be hung up on.

"I will meet you when you land," Hannibal said. "I've rented a car."

"Of course you fucking have," Will said, partially under his breath. "Yeah, okay. I'll see you then."

He hung up before Hannibal had a chance to offer any response, holding his phone in both hands and staring at the screen. Something was going on, there was a plan in place that he wasn't privy to, he knew it. Hannibal had pulled the fucking blinds again and Will felt like he was talking to a ghost. He wondered for a second if the FBI would tap his phone, and was left unsettled.

How did your appointment with the psychiatrist go? Hannibal texted.

Will ground his teeth and opened his phone to answer.

I'm not crazy, so there's that. I'm doing a sleep study on Monday and they took my blood. Will answered.

The appointment had been a shock, but he took it on the chin. The psychiatrist was a lot more vague than Will had assumed given the severity of the wording in his file. He thought he was going to have to go into his supposed spiral out of control, but instead was questioned about his eating and sleeping habits and asked to take a brief physical. They had him run on a funny little treadmill and he was out the door by mid day. He was cleared for the time being.

I've always had great faith in your sanity. Hannibal replied.

Will snorted and stuck his phone in his bag so he couldn't be tempted to reply. It was such a Hannibal thing to say; faith in his sanity. Everything oozed religious imagery with that man. It was amazing he went into medicine, given how clearly his entire being was threaded through with divine commentary. More than that, Will realized, it was the lens through which Hannibal did everything, the lens through which the Ripper killed. He had to remind himself again that just because it was beautiful, didn't mean it was just.

"Justice is blind," he murmured to himself. *"Blinded."*

Seeing Hannibal, after all those days apart, shook Will to his very core. It was like he needed the absence to remind him what his initial instincts had told him. This was a predator. All of the finery, all of the cultivated outward signs, they were highlighted now in his vision. He could see the edges, see the places the stitching couldn't hold. His eyes, his hands, his *teeth.* Some things couldn't be hidden.

"You look as if you've seen a ghost," Hannibal said, taking Will's luggage from his hand and turning back to the rental car.

"Less ghost, more apparition," Will said to himself as he climbed into the passenger side.

Hannibal opened the driver's side door and just looked at Will for a moment. His face was blank, except for the veneer of impartiality. Will rolled his eyes and pulled his seat belt on.

"Come on, Doctor," he said. "Let's get this show on the road."

Will felt, more than saw Hannibal agree, and soon enough they were pulling onto the freeway and out from under a huge bank of clouds. Sunlight poured into the car, coming through in streaks, like it was painted by the gods. Will tried to remind himself to be less of a hopeless romantic, and remember the time and place.

"You'll take me to my hotel room?" he asked, hoping he could at least change clothes before he had to go to meet Jack.

“Yes,” Hannibal replied, taking an off ramp and bringing them into the middle of the business district.

Fine, Will thought, we won’t talk. It wasn’t like speaking with Hannibal would get him any solid evidence, and that was what he needed to focus on. He would do his job, whatever was needed of him, and live another day, waiting for Hannibal to leave new evidence. He always had a way of disappearing into his words, anyway.

They drove into a motel parking lot and Hannibal turned the car off and got out, pulling Will’s luggage from the trunk. Will followed after and caught up to Hannibal in front of an upstairs room. Hannibal held out the keycard and Will rolled his eyes for the second time in ten minutes, grabbing it and opening the door for them.

"How much time do we have until-“ Will started, pausing to look over his shoulder when Hannibal locked the door. Confined. Noted. “Um, until we’ve got to meet up?”

Hannibal busied himself brushing down the front of his suit and Will tossed his luggage on the bed and went to stand in front of him, arms crossed.

“We have an hour. Less twenty minutes for travel,” Hannibal said, stiff in his delivery.

Will felt his stomach flip, warring between allowing for this space and crawling into Hannibal’s arms. He didn’t want to talk to this version of Hannibal, he wanted *his* Hannibal back.

“Will you,” he tried, “Will you give me your view of the case? While I change?”

Hannibal nodded solemnly, and went about explaining the basics. Four killers, working as a group. Three children, one adult. Two families murdered so far, mothers killed last. The most recent case found one of what Will dubbed the lost boys, burned up in the fireplace. Will flinched at that. They were closing in on the last boy’s family. Would be updated within the hour.

Will had stripped down to his boxers as Hannibal talked, grimacing at the way he averted his gaze. Hannibal *had* to know that he knew, otherwise why would he be acting so distant? How long could they really manage day to day life with a mass of dead bodies between them that neither wanted to comment on?

Will pulled a fresh shirt and undershirt from his bag, eyes focusing on his gun where it sat in its holster on the bed. Why wait to find out? He could end it all now, he could even see himself doing it. His fingers itched.

Hannibal had started talking again, zeroed in on the main culprit. He described the mother figure stringing it all together, and Will was brought back to his purpose. No matter what was going on between them, he was here to stop the boys, to pull them from their current trajectory.

“Even when we catch her, there’s nothing we can do for these boys,” he said, pulling on a fresh pair of jeans and leaning down to tie his shoes. “They gave away something none of us

can give them back."

"Peace," Hannibal suggested.

"Family," Will corrected, hand closing around his gun to attach the holster. "You only get one. They just threw it away."

"Can you really blame them?" Hannibal asked. "Abduction does something to the brain, and they're only just boys."

"Capture bonding," Will agreed, looking up to Hannibal, trying to see behind this new mask. "You bond with your captor, you live. You don't?" Will raised his eyebrows.

"You're supper," Hannibal finished. "So can you blame them?"

Will sighed, hands resting on his hips. This was a *shade* of Hannibal back, pushing him to expand his perspective. "Whether *I* can or not doesn't matter. What matters is what society says, and it ain't pretty."

Hannibal nodded, stepping forward to adjust Will's collar. He pulled it even, then rested his hands on Will's shoulders, looking him in the eye. Will could barely breathe.

"A lot has happened this past week," Hannibal said, hands brushing down Will's arms, squeezing his biceps before letting go. "I hope the space between us can be traversed."

Will felt a rush of want, felt himself begging for that statement to be true. He had to remember his plan.

"Time heals all wounds," he said, giving little away.

"I will remain, then, steadfastly yours," Hannibal replied.

Will barely had a second to think on that before both their cell phones were ringing, and they were rushing across town to the purported next kill house.

"I'm sending Lecter in," Jack shouted into his walkie.

"I'll take Will with me," Hannibal said. "If you don't mind."

"Graham too," Jack added, waving them along.

They were directed by a few officers, around the house to the backyard, through an open gate. The suspects were supposedly in the pool house, a small building with curtains covering the windows near the back of the lot.

"They have you on negotiations?" Will asked, voice a rough whisper.

"The boy called in this morning," Hannibal explained. "From a payphone on the road. We spoke briefly."

“You talked to the kid?” Will asked, wondering what that might have sounded like.

Before Hannibal could answer, the doors to the pool house opened, and four guns were trained on a small boy. Dark brown hair, face hidden behind glasses. He was short, small in his clothes, and one leg was slightly longer than the other. He was holding a handgun, but had it trained on the cold waters of the pool between them.

“Hold your fire,” Will shouted, pointing his own pistol just over the boy’s left shoulder. “Hold your fire.”

“I’m here, it’s all over,” Hannibal said, stepping in front of Will to get the boy’s attention. “Come to me now. Like we planned.”

The boy looked between Hannibal and Will, the pistol hanging weakly from one hand.

“Drop the gun,” some idiot shouted, causing everyone to shift uncomfortably.

“Come to me,” Hannibal insisted, hands open, empty, professing his own innocence. Nothing here to hurt you, they said.

Will shifted his stance, tried to bring his right shoulder down a bit like Beverly had taught him. There was movement near the edge of the door, and he knew something was coming. He couldn’t mess this up.

Breathe, he reminded himself, *breathe.*

It happened quickly then, the incident seeming to unfurl in slow motion. The woman stepped out of the building, rested her hand on the boy’s shoulder, and pointed a gun at Hannibal. In less than a second real time she was a crumpled mass on the wooden stairs, falling like a clipped marionette.

Hannibal rushed to the boy, pulling him close and slipping the gun from his hands. It was tossed aside as Will jumped past them and knelt next to the woman. She took a few gurgling breaths, blood coming to her lips, as Will took away her gun. Her whole body jerked and Will placed a hand on her shoulder, right above the three bloody holes he’d put in her, and another on her rib cage. He could feel the beating of her heart, feel every breath.

Will wanted to ask her why, why she had to be so selfish, why she had to steal these boys away, but she was going fast. He felt time shift back to normal, shouts and movement around him coming clear through the fog, and he was stumbling back, blinking away the feel of deer fur on his hands.

He looked up as he was maneuvered away, relieved of his weapon. Hannibal was holding the boy to his chest as they passed, his hand running gently over his hair as the boy shook. It was like watching him through a crowd at a theater during intermission. Their eyes caught as Will got close.

See? Hannibal’s eyes said. *Do you see why you had to be here?*

Will swallowed down bile and let the officer continue to drag him away to sit in the back of an ambulance. Fate, he thought, *funny thing.*

Chapter End Notes

Will: why am I going to NC??
Hannibal, planning justifiable murder with the help of a lost child: no reason

Gentle Now

Chapter Summary

Will hears a sound outside his hotel room, and goes to investigate.

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes

Will had only been asleep for about an hour, body finally emptied of adrenalin and hollowed out in its absence, when the scratching woke him. He cocked his head to the side, eyes still closed, and took in the nighttime ambiance of the hotel room. The heater clicked from the wall, a low hum emanated from the floor, and a high whine of electricity sprang from the television set affixed to the wall.

Scratch.

Will breathed evenly, timing the sound, trying to decide where it was coming from.

Click. Hum. Whine. *Scratch.*

Will was out of bed and dressing hastily before the next sequence finished. He fumbled in his bag for the pen flashlight they'd allowed on the plane, and, it tight in hand, emerged into the freezing wind of the early *early* morning. He shivered and closed his room door, then walked down the way to the stairs, taking them two at a time. He heard the scratch again, coming in clearer, battling against the crack of his footsteps on the broken asphalt and tree litter covered gravel path to the back of the building.

He wove his way between overgrown hedges and gnarled trees, back pressed to chain link fence. The metal was freezing through his jacket, close enough to heat to feel like burning hands on his shoulder blades. A huff of breath created a white cloud in front of him. Listen. *Listen.* His flashlight cut through the darkness in a tight arch, roaming up the brick wall and to the left. He estimated where his room was and walked until he was below the first story window.

The hum was louder now, and seemed to be coming from the building's electrical system, the box wrapped in ivy and gray vines, choked with vegetation. Will watched it, in the beam of his flashlight, and listened.

Scratch.

The beam of light skittered, drew left in the direction of the sound, and Will couldn't help but breathe faster. When his flashlight hit it, he almost couldn't believe what he was seeing. His

hand shook, the image burned into his mind like a brand; a man crouching no more than a hundred yards away, on the other side of the fence.

If the curve of the hands, or shadow of brow hadn't given it away, the dark blue pinstriped suit and blood-red paisley tie absolutely did. That it was Hannibal, out there in the scraggly grass and overgrown bushes, wasn't the most frightening thing. No, thing that would haunt Will, maybe for the rest of his life, was the way the flashlight reflected bright red from his pupils. Two red-hot cherries, burning away in his head.

Eyeshine, the visible reflection of light in an animal's eyes at night, or in low light conditions, was something Will was very familiar with. He had encountered more wildlife than just his own dogs in the Maryland night's over the years, their eyes shining back in a variety of colors. Some of his own dogs even had the red-eye effect. Human eyes were different though, they didn't have the physical structure to produce eyeshine. They just didn't.

They didn't. The words were on his lips the second he was jolted out of his thoughts and back to the world.

"Will," the familiar voice echoed from the end of the building.

Will turned his head and found Hannibal standing under the security lamp, right where he had originally entered the back easeway. The yellow light washed out his gray suit and tie, making him look more a part of the landscape than he usually managed. He cocked his head to the side when Will didn't reply, and Will turned back to where his flashlight was trained.

Nothing. There was nothing in the clearing between the bushes and wild grass, no man crouching, no blood-red pocket square. Nothing.

Will looked back to Hannibal, in that spray of light. He found himself shaking like a leaf.

"Let me bring you inside," Hannibal said, finally straying from the perfect crescent of light to walk into the darkness and hold a hand out for Will.

Something in Will was screaming at him to run, to press himself along the fence, closer to the other side of the building. He fought it and pushed through the inertia to start shuffling towards Hannibal. One step at a time, sideways, he worked himself out of the tight spot, taking Hannibal's hand and allowing himself to be pulled out and brushed down.

Hannibal stood back once he was mostly clean, and looked Will over. Whatever he thought of Will, of how he looked, he was magnificently silent as he carefully walked Will back to his room. He didn't even comment on having to help Will with the keycard. He just sat Will on the edge of the bed and knelt to untie Will's shoes, cradling the first work boot with care.

Will felt like he was barely breathing, but that was better than hyperventilation, surely. Hannibal looked up at him as he pulled the first boot off, and Will clicked the penlight on, flashing it in Hannibal's eyes quickly. Hannibal flinched away, but his eyes didn't light up.

"Just checking," Will said, looking over Hannibal carefully, his mouth a thin line.

“What were you doing outside?” Hannibal asked, starting on Will’s other boot.

“I heard an animal,” Will said, distantly aware of his flat affect. “It woke me up.”

It was the animal that lives in my shower, he *didn’t* say. It’s *my* animal, from *home.*

The thoughts that were begging to become words frightened Will and he ached for some bit of balance. Hannibal just watched him, saying nothing. He pulled off Will’s other boot, and removed both socks, rolling them into a ball and placing them on the floor next to the bed. He looked back up at Will, and shifted to brace his hands to rise from his knees.

“No,” Will said, hands shooting out to grip Hannibal’s shoulders.

Hannibal let out a huff and sank back down to his knees, looking up at Will with what could only be called cautious curiosity. The most important thing, Will thought, was that he read anything off the man. His mouth felt stuck, and he ran his right hand through Hannibal’s hair to try and communicate what he couldn’t say. His thumb brushed across Hannibal’s cheekbone, stroking with all the affection he knew he shouldn’t feel.

“Stay,” was all Will could manage. “Stay.”

Hannibal's eyes closed and he let out a long sigh, relaxing under Will’s hands, allowing the caress. Will couldn’t help himself, he gripped Hannibal’s face with both hands, and turned his head back and forth. He wasn’t sure what he was looking for, what he thought he might find just below the jaw, just behind the ear. Some string, some entry point? What he found was achingly human and he bent to take Hannibal’s mouth in a deep kiss.

Hannibal made a soft sound, shifted on his knees and allowed Will to part his lips, lick into his mouth. Will kissed him slowly, every taste and whimper proof Hannibal was a man. He wanted so much *more.*

He held Hannibal’s head steady, turned his own to press their noses together, to tease more sounds out of Hannibal. Hands, *those hands,* gripped his calves, pulled his legs further apart so Hannibal could press up on his knees between them. He kissed Will back, wrapping his arms around his waist, pulling Will forward until his pelvis made contact with Hannibal’s torso.

Will grunted at the feeling, his cock pressing painfully against the seam of his jeans, just left of good. He reached around Hannibal’s arm, tearing at the button and fly of his jeans, sighing in relief when his pants opened. He hooked his thumbs under the waist of his jeans and shoved them down to just under his ass. Hannibal made an approving sound, and Will thrust his hips, rutting up between Hannibal’s pecs, cockhead shocked at the drag of fabric, the warmth of Hannibal’s skin through his clothes, thin cotton.

Hannibal drew back, eyes wide and shining, mouth hanging open. Will pushed him, hands going to grip his face once he was back into a resting position. Hannibal allowed the adjustment, panting and growling a bit, but taking Will’s thumb into his mouth without protest. Will ran the pad of his thumb along Hannibal’s lower teeth, seeing if he would bite.

When he was satisfied there wasn't any danger there he pulled down the waist of his boxers and held his cock out with his left hand, gripping it at its base.

"Open," he whispered, unable to look away from Hannibal's burning eyes. "Gentle now."

Hannibal let his mouth open wider, slicked his lips with his tongue, and met the head of Will's cock with wet heat and light suction. He curled his tongue and moaned as Will rolled his hips, pushing into his mouth, both hands now gripping his face. Hannibal closed his lips and rolled his tongue and Will decided he didn't care at all what either of them had done, as long as they could keep doing this.

"Fuck," he cursed under his breath, eyes flitting between where he was sliding into Hannibal's mouth, and where Hannibal's eyes were fixed on his.

He was beautiful, rosy cheeked and so pliant, so Will took pity on him and slid his left foot between Hannibal's legs, pressed up against him in invitation. Hannibal grunted, took a long breath in through his nose and ground himself down against Will's shin. Hannibal's eyelids closed and Will felt a shock at the memory of his doppelgänger in the clearing.

He brushed his thumbs up, pulled down both of Hannibal's lower eyelids, staring as the man blinked up at him, a surprised sound sending white-hot arousal through Will. He picked up speed, pulling saliva from the edges of Hannibal's mouth, snapping his hips with more urgency.

Hannibal moaned beneath him and Will dragged both thumbs over Hannibal's cheekbones, soothing him, holding his head like it was something sacred, *because* it was something sacred. He felt his cock jump at the thought and a wash of something rolled over him.

"Shh."

It was just a breath. Hannibal looked up at him, locking eyes as Will pushed the head of his cock into his airway. His nose huffed where it was buried momentarily in Will's pubic hair, and Will drew back, starting a slow, *deep* rhythm that was sure to push them both over the edge.

"Hannibal," Will murmured, the name so familiar on his tongue.

Hannibal grunted and Will let his right thumb press into the bottom edge of Hannibal's eye socket. He pushed down, curling his thumb for a second like he would press in, and Hannibal's eye started watering. Will pulled back, pressing along the edge of the bone again, hard enough that it must have stung with pain, would surely bruise.

Instead of retreating, Hannibal pushed forward, swallowing around Will's cock, choking himself and refusing to break eye contact, even as he was now crying in a steady stream. Will snarled, jabbed him quickly in the eye, held his hand back and slapped Hannibal's face once, hard.

He felt Hannibal's teeth, his choking gasp, and he was coming, thrusting into Hannibal's mouth until it spilled foamy from the edge of his sealed lips. Hannibal coughed a bit when

Will withdrew, and let his head fall back, humping up against Will's shin two, three times before he was still, coming with a low moan. The both of them panted raggedly in the quiet of the room.

Will extricated himself from Hannibal's grip and pushed his pants and boxers the rest of the way down, then walked around Hannibal to turn the lights off. He left his jacket on the chair on his way back to Hannibal, and balled his undershirt in one hand to clean up Hannibal's face.

It was hard to tell, his eyes still adjusting, glasses lost at some point, but Hannibal looked to be shaking slightly as Will approached. Will knelt and leaned in to nuzzle against Hannibal's neck. He ran his fingers through Hannibal's hair, over his brow, and pressed his lips just behind his ear, kissing the hollow there.

"Alright?" he asked, running the soft cotton over Hannibal's damp face, down his throat.

Hannibal nodded, and Will started helping him undress, nothing between them but hot breath and perfect silence. Eventually they got up and onto the bed, and Hannibal allowed himself to be arranged under the covers. Will curled into his side, wrapping one leg over his thigh possessively as he pulled the covers over them tight. Hannibal's arm jumped into action and he held Will close, his chin resting on top of Will's head with a long sigh.

Chapter End Notes

Unhinged sex, that's what it's about babeyyyyy! We're making mistaaaakes! 🥵👅💦

Truce

Chapter Summary

Hannibal works to carefully maneuver their new truce in the light of day.

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes

Will was still asleep, breathing deeply in the warm pile of covers and pillows, when Hannibal caught his reflection in the mirror. The bottom of his left eye-socket was painted a dark blue, feathering around the edges like it had been drawn by a fountain pen. He stepped closer, ducked to see his eye up close, pulling his eyelid down. There was a round mark right where Will had jabbed him the night before, blood-red cupping the iris, taking up about a quarter of the sclera.

The wave that overtook him was monstrous, he felt weak as it washed over him. Joy bubbled up in its wake, an understanding that had yet to find words. Something about acceptance lying just on the other side of regret, something about forgiveness coming quickly and with force.

He couldn't help but press closer, Narcissus bending eagerly over the edge of the pond, closer to the proof of his own existence, laid out in black and blue. If Will could punish him, he thought wildly, then perhaps he could forgive him.

He shuddered as he dragged his pointer finger along his painted eye socket. He'd have to remind himself to obey better next time, to take exactly what Will was giving him, and nothing more. He felt Will's passion like a collar around his neck, and he would wear it proudly.

Will woke at the first sounds of cooking, his body shifting, eyes blinking open. Hannibal cracked the second egg into the pan, adjusting it on the travel induction hob and going back to the small cutting board.

"Good morning," he offered warmly, slicing stalks of herbs and moving them on the blade of his knife to the pan.

Will squinted, rolled onto his back and stretched, letting out a soft sigh before going still again. Hannibal smiled, enjoying the view. He was like a house cat waking from a long nap, utterly unbothered. Hannibal swallowed down at the feeling in his throat and grabbed the coffee pot. He poured a cup for Will and walked to the edge of the bed, holding it out. Will took it with a grunt.

“May I say you look ravishing this morning?” Hannibal asked.

“You already have,” Will said, taking a long sip from the paper cup, brows furrowed in false seriousness.

Hannibal gave him a tight smile, internally bursting with pride, and went back to stir the eggs. He listened as Will got out of bed and went to relieve himself, all the grunts and tics of that level of intimacy reminding Hannibal of their early days in Will’s car. Getting to know him, getting to know him all over again.

The shower was turned on and Hannibal finished up the eggs, reaching into his grocery bag for the soft cheese and the bag of donuts from the famous local spot. He plated their breakfast and set out forks and knives on the two person dining/office table. Will emerged from the bathroom just as he finally sat.

“This looks amazing,” Will said, sitting across from Hannibal and picking up a donut.

He bit into it and made another few comments and congratulations and Hannibal bit the inside of his mouth to keep from smiling out of turn. There was a silent truce happening, a blood for blood promise that found equilibrium, and Hannibal thrilled at the warmth rolling off of Will. He sat there, hair damp, in nothing but a motel towel, and gave Hannibal the most open smiles.

“You’ve woken up in a good mood, if that grin is anything to go by,” Hannibal noted.

Will chewed, held his fork up to show he was working on an answer, and looked up and to the left. When he spoke, he dealt the words like cards in a game, each holding their own weight, their own meaning. *Pay attention,* it said.

“I missed you feeding me,” he allowed, catching Hannibal’s eye finally. “It feels like completing some ritual task.”

Ritual. Hannibal beamed at him. He was speaking his language, indulgently.

“You feel,” Hannibal pressed, pausing to eat and look Will over, “fulfilled?”

Will laughed a bit, covering his mouth and leaning back in his chair. He licked his lips, held a hand over his chest theatrically, and spoke. “Have I shifted from Prophet to Prophecy so easily? Where along the line did I lose my agency? No, I feel in tune.”

Hannibal was emboldened by Will’s manner, his seams gave a bit, something slipping out. He wanted recognition of his piece in this truce, his sacrifice. Like some touch-starved thing, he ached to be embraced, accepted.

“I have tickets for L’Histiore du Soldat on New Year’s Eve at the Lyric,” he said, eyes flitting to his plate. “I’ve been afraid to ask you.”

“Well, you haven’t been on your best behavior, have you?” Will asked, his bluntness cutting arousal right through Hannibal like a knife. “Speaking of which, your plan of getting me to

carry a gun for protection is fucked since I had to give mine up to forensics. It was used in a deadly force encounter, if you'll remember. You failed, Hannibal. Unless that was the plan."

"That is an accurate description of what happened, but I'll happily remind you," Hannibal said, headstrong even as warmth broke out along his cheeks, "it isn't a no."

"Excuse the redirection. Ask me, then," Will said, holding his hands out, smug as hell.

"Would you do me the favor of joining me at the opera at the end of the year? There is a dinner after in the adjoining great hall, and-" Hannibal asked, eyes still on his plate.

"And all your friends will be there," Will finished crudely. "Darling, who else would I be with on New Year's Eve?"

Hannibal smiled up at him, catching his eye finally and holding it. Will was planning something. There was a cold glint to the edge of his smile, and Hannibal felt himself leaning into it eagerly. *He would let this man place the noose around his neck, any day.*

"You're renting me a tux," Will added, leaning forward in the chair to finish his breakfast.

"Of course," Hannibal said, watching the way Will's hand gripped the knife. "As I've said, anything you want."

Jack was waiting for them outside the station. Will squeezed Hannibal's hand and got out of the rental car first, walking ahead to greet Jack. Hannibal looked out the window and watched them speak for a moment before he joined them.

"Woah, black eye with bloody sclera. Subconjunctival hemorrhage," Jack announced, wincing at Hannibal's face. "I was a boxer in my youth," he said as some sort of explanation. "Do we need to talk about who gave you a black eye?"

Hannibal liked the way Jack glanced at Will, as if he were just becoming aware he was standing next to something dangerous. He was right after all.

"Must have happened during the struggle yesterday. Bruises come on slowly, on occasion," Hannibal said, resting his hand low on Will's back.

He felt Will tense as Jack looked on disbelieving.

"Okay," Jack replied slowly. "Well, let's get this over with so we can get home. Will, you've got a briefing with local brass, and then the three of us need to sign out. After that you can get to the airport."

He led them into the building and down a hall to a room where a woman with a binder on her desk was waiting. Will walked in to get briefed, day-after nonsense or whatever, and Hannibal remained in the hallway with Jack.

"You two sure have an interesting relationship," Jack said, only speaking once they were alone.

“Boxing in your youth?” Hannibal asked in reply. “Did you truly become tame when you transferred that adrenaline seeking behavior into a career?”

Jack huffed out a surprised breath. “No, not entirely.”

“Then you should know not to ask questions you don’t want the answers to,” Hannibal replied smoothly, holding his head high in defiance.

Jack’s nose curled and he looked like he wanted to protest, but he kept quiet, and Hannibal reveled in the small victory. It only lasted a moment.

“If you need anything,” Jack said, “you know you just have to ask. We’ve known each other for a while now, and I just...if you needed something, you wouldn’t have to tell me why. Okay?”

It was a moment where Hannibal was reminded that not everything was a fight for power, and he shrank in the light of that vulnerability. Jack was offering him something, an olive branch or a life jacket, and he wasn’t made to accept either. That in itself was a sort of loneliness.

“I recognize your offer,” Hannibal said. “I will bear it in mind.”

Jack nodded and seemed to be looking for a way out. He finally settled on the familiar. “I’m gonna grab some coffee. Want a cup?”

“I’m fine,” Hannibal said, smiling at him blandly.

Jack took one last look at him and walked off down the hallway towards the front of the building. Hannibal stood there in the quiet of the hall, and felt all his raw edges showing. He was tired of being around anyone but Will, the one person who could really understand him. He resigned himself to emailing his tailor, to prepare for the opera.

The new conductor was brilliant, a transplant from New York that brought with her a fresh vision. He’d been planning on bringing Will to the opera for months but had become discouraged in the last week, what with Will’s changing attitude. Now he was sure that whether Will was coming to join him, or to damn him, he *would* be there. That was really all he could ask for, in the end.

He was jolted from his thoughts when Will opened the door and emerged from the meeting. There must have been something in his eyes that gave away the bone deep ache in him for Will, because he saw it reflected there. Will’s frame went from taught to relaxed the second they were touching, just the brush of hand against hand. A shared relief.

“I want to go home,” Will said, sidling up to Hannibal leaning back against the wall for a moment.

“I’m sorry I pulled you away from your life,” Hannibal replied, as true as he could allow himself.

“But you’re happy for the company,” Will concluded, whispering to him fondly. “Selfish little thing.”

Hannibal swallowed hard. There was a comfort in being seen. All his little lies, all the sleight of hand, met halfway.

“Come on, now,” Will said. “We have more paperwork. You’ll get me alone on the plane.”

Hannibal smiled and followed him. He’d upgraded Will’s flight so they could sit alone in first class together, the rest of the team near the back of the plane. It wasn’t like they really knew anyone other than Jack and maybe two of the techs, but he wanted Will to himself.

They went through the usual steps of logging out of their temporary computers and giving back any security badges they’d collected, Hannibal had three, and they were back in the car on the way to the airport in no time. It was so close to normal that Hannibal couldn’t help but take Will’s hand in his and kiss his knuckles, his scent warm at his wrist.

Chapter End Notes

Hannibal, happily allowing Will to place a noose around his neck: look at the two of us, lovebirds.

Will: we’re something alright

Magical thinking

Chapter Summary

Will thinks over what to tackle next, and ends up at their origins.

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes

Will had called Hannibal *darling* that morning. There were so many more pressing issues, and Will was fixed on that miscalculation. It must have stuck out as over the top, must have given him away. When they'd first talked about the opera he had turned down the offer easily. It sounded like a terrible night, so of course he turned it down.

Now, however, it was a different story. Now he was being asked to the opera by the Chesapeake Ripper, and there was no way he'd turn that down. He'd become a bit obsessed lately with the idea that Hannibal's group of friends might hold the key. There was something that he wasn't quite seeing, some whisper of meaning that still eluded him. So yes, the opera was a different thing this go round.

That reminded Will about something that had been hanging just over his shoulder since it was asked of him earlier that week. How long had the Ripper been courting him? He'd worked three Ripper cases before he met Hannibal, and consulted on the previous sounder. Three years of being up to his neck in the man's brutality and now he had him so close.

Will shook the thought off, looked up from the airplane magazine. They'd been in the air for twenty minutes, and Hannibal was currently destroying a book of sudoku, the toe of his shoe resting up against Will's ankle. Will needed to get back on track, he needed to get a better picture of Hannibal's and his history to know how to proceed.

"When did you first hear about me? I mean, I assume you knew of me professionally before we met." Will said, trying to sound a little less calculating, a little more flirtatious. Although both would probably get a response out of Hannibal. He was uniquely engaged in whatever they were talking about all morning.

Hannibal looked at him, that red eye mocking the memory of the doppelganger. Creation wasn't always such a clean thing, Will supposed. He realized Hannibal was weighing his words. *Maybe even* deciding whether or not to tell the truth. It was just them, in that sterile little cubby in first class, so they could speak freely, if they wanted to.

"I don't want to ruin your good humor," Hannibal said, putting down his sudoku book and slipping his pen back in his jacket.

"Okay, how about this?" Will tried, leaning closer to him, offering him unadulterated eye contact. "You answer one question from me, honestly, and I'll do the same. Question for question."

Hannibal seemed to weigh that, nodding briefly.

"Dr. Frederick Chilton has a bit of a fixation on you," Hannibal admitted.

"You don't say," Will deadpanned, stomach souring predictably.

"He's been trying to drop your name into normal conversation for two, three years. I first heard about your work with the FBI at a fundraiser for a new wing at Johns Hopkins," Hannibal explained.

Will could imagine it, all the rich and semi-famous brushing elbows for a cause, Chilton trying to impress. Will could admit to himself that he looked good on paper, almost impressive. It was the whole in person thing that didn't work out most times.

"And was Frederick going on about my sex appeal and dreamy curls?" Will teased, just this side of bitter, looking up through his eyelashes.

"No," Hannibal said with an indulgent smile. "But that was just the first time I heard your name. I admit I wasn't intrigued by Frederick's antics. It was when Alana spoke of you, that I took note. She may have mentioned your dreamy curls."

Will laughed at that, feeling that same old pull to keep the conversation going. He didn't know how Hannibal made it so invigorating just to converse. It felt like gymnastics, like stretching some forgotten muscle.

"So she told you about me, and, what?" Will asked, remembering the Summer with a distant ache, easier now.

"And I did my research," Hannibal replied. "Your acceptance speech for your microbiology scholarship was moving, though poorly recorded."

Will's smile fell a tick. That had been a decade ago, at least. The thought that a recording of it was just banging around out there after all that time was sickening.

"I didn't expect to meet you on campus that first day," Hannibal said, picking up the change in temperature. “I simply recognized your voice."

"You must have listened to that speech a few times," Will said, hand reaching out to brush down Hannibal's sleeve. He wasn’t sure how that made him feel.

"You kept me company before we even met," Hannibal replied, looking serious for such a fantastical comment.

"Magical thinking," Will replied.

"In retrospect," Hannibal agreed. "At the time I was fully enamored. I knew we would meet at some point, it was only a matter of patience."

"You wanted the upper hand," Will suggested, mulling it over.

"I wanted all of you," Hannibal corrected.

"You've got your question still," Will reminded him, trying to distance himself from the roiling thing inside himself that was screaming the word *danger* on repeat.

"You're not acting like you've just killed a woman," Hannibal said, so smoothly it snuck up on Will. "I'm wondering why."

Will took a second to look out the window. Alarms were going off in his ears, but it didn't show. His battle, as usual, was internal.

"How am I supposed to act? I mean, if modern psychology can't even tell me how to *feel,* then maybe we're just in no man's land," he said.

"How *do* you feel?" Hannibal asked, brazen.

"I feel like I did my job," Will said, a little defensive.

"As an officer of the law, you may feel one way. Underneath, Will, what remains?" Hannibal pressed.

"I'm angry," Will admitted, disgusted with himself. "I wanted her dead and now she's dead, don't let her guilt hide that. I can't undo what she did, and that pisses me off. And now I have to go home and write lesson plans and do a fucking sleep study."

Hannibal started to talk, but Will gave him a look that had him changing his mind.

"I'm…I'm seeing things," Will admitted. "So, how's that fit into the view from *the shore?"*

Something happened behind Hannibal's eyes, something coming together in the man's mind. It made Will even more uneasy.

"Do you remember calling me last night, Will?" Hannibal asked, his eyes cold and empty in that second.

Will felt a sick drop in his gut. He hadn't called anyone the night before. He'd gone back to the hotel after his last briefing, showered and went to sleep. He was sure of it.

"No," he said, tapping through the menus on his phone to look at outgoing calls. *There it was, at 3:30 am, one call out.* "No. No. What did I say?"

Everything was getting a little blurry, and Will could hear a familiar crash of waves growing. He just wanted this all to be over.

"My name," Hannibal told him. "Just my name."

Chapter End Notes

Let's all ponder a 27 year old Will Graham, writing an acceptance speech on microbiology, shall we?

Jet Lag

Chapter Summary

> Hannibal and Will have their own ways of dealing with getting back to Maryland and work.

It was freezing when they made it off the airplane and out of the main building of the airport. Will pulled his jacket tighter around himself as they jogged across the pick-up line traffic to get to the main parking lot. Hannibal carried Will's luggage to his car for him, which was just his work bag and a carry on. He unlocked the car with freezing fingers and popped the trunk. Hannibal leaned against the sedan as Will tucked his things inside. When they were finally face to face again Will felt tongue-tied.

"Will you go fishing this weekend, if it doesn't rain?" Hannibal asked, breaking the silence. He took Will's hands in his own and warmed them with his breath.

"I've got a test to write," Will replied. "I've got homework to grade and a whole week's worth of planning ahead of me. Plus I have to go over the notes from my substitute."

"You can't work two days straight," Hannibal countered. "You need to recover."

Will wanted to hit him. Recover? He needed to recover from what *Hannibal* had pulled him into, he needed to recover from the lost sleep and jet lag. What he didn't need, was the person that caused all of it suggesting that. He clenched his jaw and looked out across the parking lot; it was the best he could do.

"Can I bring you dinner tomorrow night?" Hannibal asked, kissing Will's knuckles gently before letting his hands go.

"I think I need some time alone," Will admitted, voice gruff.

"Then I'll leave it on your porch, seven o'clock," Hannibal said, hands brushing down Will's shoulders.

Will rolled his eyes, but allowed the kiss to his forehead when Hannibal leaned in. He let his eyes close completely as Hannibal picked up his luggage and walked away, ostensibly towards his own car. Will didn't look, because he didn't care. He just wanted to open his eyes again and be alone.

When he'd waited long enough he pulled himself together and got into his car, starting the engine and heading towards the exit. He had an hour drive home, so he played a cd so he wouldn't have to listen to his own thoughts, or worse, Christmas music.

Hannibal checked his phone to make sure the Bluetooth connection was solid and started up his car. The moment he was out of the winding exit and onto the freeway he pressed play on the recording.

“Hannibal?” Will’s voice came through the speakers of the car, the panic evident in his tone as he continued. “Hannibal, I think there’s someone here. I think-“ there was a scratch, a cough, a rustle that must have been the phone changing hands. “I need you.”

Hannibal’s eyelids fluttered and he tapped on the voicemail again, turning the volume up. His foot pressed down on the gas pedal, a sense of potentiality and purpose clutching at his throat.

“Hannibal? Hannibal, I think-“ the recording said, running through again until the break. Hannibal held his breath, listened for the words again. “I need you.”

By the time Monday rolled around Will could almost admit to himself that he missed Hannibal. He'd been true to his word and left dinner on Will's porch the night before without interrupting, and they hadn’t spoken on the phone.

It had been peculiar eating without Hannibal and his constant narration. Will had spent so many hours just listening to Hannibal explain food origins that he found the man’s voice sprouting up here and there in his day when things were quiet, like he was listening to him on the radio. Hannibal, in his mind, had told him all about the history of weighing bread while he ate the chicken dinner he'd been gifted last night, and he had nodded along.

When Hannibal tapped on the car window Will jumped, jolted out of the memory. He'd forgotten somehow to expect the black eye, the ends going purple now, softening the edges. He pressed the unlock button and tried to not look spooked.

“Sauteed field mushrooms,” Hannibal said, settling into the seat next to Will and holding out the usual high end Tupperware container. “homemade brown soda bread, baked beans, liver, and hash browns.”

This smells amazing,” Will said, already digging into the baked beans and mushrooms. “I'm gonna sleep through my shrink appointment in a food coma.”

Hannibal topped off Will’s travel mug and sat back to look him over. Will could feel his eyes on him. It was a comfortable weight.

“When is your appointment? Perhaps I could introduce myself,” Hannibal said after a moment.

Will looked over at him, amazed by how unapologetic he was. It took a purposeful readjustment to not *flirt* with him about his domineering approach. Apparently that had become a habit of theirs.

“You’re fostering codependency,” he pointed out instead, taking a bite of the bread to keep from giving a nervous smile.

“I want to ensure you’re in the best hands,” Hannibal replied.

“You’re full of shit,” Will said with a laugh, breaking. “You don't want anyone talking to me, and you certainly don’t want anyone else poking around up here.” He punctuated his words by pointing to his own temple.

Too many cooks, he thought absently.

“You’ve started to curse on a more regular basis,” Hannibal said, a clear diversion. “Is it out of frustration with me, or a deepening sense of comradery?”

Will kept eating, letting the question sit in the air between them. He hadn’t noticed really, so maybe it was the latter. He felt like his frustration level with Hannibal had evened out, back to where it was when they’d first met; Hannibal once again playing unstoppable force to his immovable object. *Exept now you fuck him,* a voice in his head mocked crudely. He tried not to think about how he should clearly be feeling more than just frustration.

“I'm well aware of your disdain for psychiatry, and although you may be tempted to simply wait out the clock, I would suggest there are many ways you could take advantage of the time. There's nothing wrong with getting a second opinion about your internal framework. You've been under quite a lot of stress recently. Will you tell them that you’re sleepwalking?” Hannibal asked, his voice so warm, so aggravatingly caring.

No, Will thought. He glared at him just above the line of his glasses. “That’s been going on for a while. I’m supposed to talk about my deadly force encounter. I’d rather keep it narrow.”

In all honesty, he was afraid they would take him off the Ripper case. Yeah, he might lose his teaching job too if they found out how apparently fucked his head was, but he was obviously more focused on the Ripper. There would be no point to anything if he had to back out now.

“You don’t think they should know?” Hannibal asked, unfazed by Will's insistence. “This is a chance for diagnosis.”

“They can-” Will spat. He clenched his teeth and didn’t let out the next few words. *They can diagnose this dick.* Christ, he did seem to be going a little overboard. He took a deep breath and pulled it back. “I have an appointment with my doctor about that next week, and sleep study tonight, in case you forgot. Plenty of opportunities for diagnosis.”

He looked up at Hannibal then, catching his eye only briefly. Hannibal was watching him, but Will wasn’t sure what was going on in his head. He hated when he couldn’t tell, had become so used to Hannibal being open to him. The man had been overly so after *that night,* even with the new addition of the black eye . He wanted to get that back, that preening Hannibal.

“You can walk with me to my appointment,” he allowed, thinking it was probably as easy as tit for tat. “It’s in the administration hall.”

Hannibal smiled at him and he was sure it was the right move. He swallowed hard and rested his hand on Hannibal’s thigh, gaze drifting out the window. He was shocked sometimes at how predictably smitten Hannibal was.

“Finish your breakfast,” Hannibal said, nudging Will with his elbow.

Will sighed, and did just that.

Snare

Chapter Summary

Will enlists Beverly's help in his plan to catch Hannibal, and Hannibal sees his therapist.

Chapter Notes

All right guys, as we get close to breaking 80,000 words I'm switching to posting every other day. I've honestly never written a story this long before and I care about it too much to mess it up by moving too quickly. What a wicked web we weave etc etc etc you know what I'm talking about 💋

See the end of the chapter for more notes

The entire world seemed to be wired and lit up with twinkling lights now that the sun had set, and it didn't help Will's headache at all. He found street parking and fumbled in his pocket for his bottle of aspirin, pouring out two into the palm of his hand and dry swallowing them. He didn't need pain derailing him.

He was meeting Beverley for dinner, as it was surprisingly already Friday, and he had promised her pizza. They were going to eat at a place near Johns Hopkins, with an artisanal menu and an interior that looked like a warehouse online. He'd picked it because it was rated as slow on Friday nights.

He found the entrance and walked inside, bracing at the lights and warmth. He blinked a few times, shading his eyes with his hands, and found Beverly seated near the back. He was thankful that they weren't playing Christmas music through the speakers as he made his way over and sat down across from her.

"You made it!" Beverly said, grinning at him. "Check out the menu."

Will took it from her and looked it over. The photographs of the food showed off an attention to form that made him think of Hannibal. He found a pizza that looked good just as the waiter got there to take their order.

"Milo and Mico?" Will asked, not sure he was saying his order correctly. "Large."

The waiter nodded to him, so he supposed he was fine, and turned to Beverly.

"I'll get a large pistachio pizza," Beverly told the man.

He nodded again and left them to their own devices after explaining that drinks could be ordered at the bar. Beverly relaxed and fiddled with the salt and pepper on their table. Will was buzzing with what he wanted to talk about, but he wasn't sure how to open. He always had trouble with the beginning of conversations.

"You didn't choose this place because of the dog chef painting, did you?" Beverley asked, pointing over his shoulder to the far wall.

Will laughed, looking over at the poster of a yellow lab in a chef's hat. "No, no. I promise. But you did find something you'll like, right?"

"Oh, I'm up for the adventure," she replied. "What's yours got on it?"

"Anchovies," Will said with a real smile. "They're an underrated fish."

"You're an underrated fish," Beverly teased. "How have you been? How are you feeling? What are you and Hannibal doing for Christmas?"

"That's a lot of questions," Wil said with a snort. "Not sure how I've been, or how I'm feeling. They've got me on antibiotics for the fever, so my stomach has been off."

"Better be eating yogurt. That stuff kills all the good bugs in your gut," Beverly noted, standing and leaning against the table. "That mean you don't want a beer?"

"Actually, that sounds good. Nothing too hoppy," Will replied as she turned to go order.

He watched her flirt with the bartender in the reflection in the window. He was handsome, a little younger than them, but probably not by much. When everything was over, when they'd caught the Ripper, Will thought he might get back to dating. There was a lingering ache as he thought the words. He hadn't realized how easily he'd shifted to thinking of Hannibal like an ex. Maybe that would stop him from sleeping with him again.

"Here ya go," Beverly said, back at his side, passing him a tall glass and taking her seat again. "Now tell me what's on your mind."

Will took a long drink and tried to refocus. His plan was twofold, and it involved getting her to say yes to something easy first. "You have to help me pick out a Christmas present for Hannibal."

Beverly laughed and shook her head. "Jesus, Graham. You waited long enough, Christmas is in less than a week."

"Six days, yes," Will admitted. "I've been busy. Plus, he's the perfect example of the man who has everything."

Beverly drank her beer and thought about it. "Okay, let's list out his main interests. Classical music, right? He likes wine. What about something for a chef? Food is kind of his thing."

Will agreed, but he also knew he couldn't get Hannibal the same fruit, nut and cured meats platter he got everyone else.

“How much are you looking to spend?” Beverly asked, sitting back as their pizzas were brought to the table and placed between them.

“At least a hundred, less than two,” Will explained. He couldn’t help the pleased sigh that slipped out when he took the first bite of his pizza.

“When was the last time you ate?” Beverly teased. “That was practically pornographic.”

“Not since breakfast,” Will replied. “I told you my stomach is off.”

“At least they’re treating you. Took you long enough to see somebody,” Beverly said, very much in big sister mode.

“Yeah, well, hard to avoid when you end up shooting somebody,” Will allowed. “At least my aim was better. I remembered what you told me about lowering my right shoulder.”

“What about a knife?” Bev asked, throwing him off. It must have showed on his face because she elaborated. “You can get a good chef’s knife for a hundred and fifty. It’s not terribly personal, but he’s gonna use it, right? Plus, they always come in a nice box.”

Will imagined Hannibal unwrapping a knife, holding it in his hand. It was suicidal. Or, maybe, just the right thing. What better way to put Hannibal at ease than by handing him a knife and then sleeping in his bed. It would be the perfect chance to obscure his own very real fears.

“There’s a chef’s shop just down the street,” Beverly said. “We could stop by on the way out.”

“Yeah,” Will said, nodding. “That’s actually a really good idea.”

“Just name your first kid after me,” Beverly teased. “That’s all I ask.”

Will rolled his eyes, but this was exactly how he needed Bev; self congratulatory and open. He paused, and got down to the real business.

“I have another thing you could help me with,” he said, letting it hang in the air.

“Oh yeah, explain away.”

“I’m going to the opera on New Year’s Eve,” he explained. “First show since the murder of the last conductor. Hannibal is taking me.”

Beverly picked up a paper napkin and carefully wiped her hands down.

“I want to record everything,” Will explained. “This could be our chance to catch the Ripper.”

“Our chance?” Beverly asked, already skeptical. “Is that us as in you and me, or us as in the FBI, Will? What does Hannibal think about this? Or Jack for that matter.”

“Hannibal knows as much as he needs to. Enough that he won’t get under my feet,” Will argued, feeling a sour twist in his stomach. “And Jack has to stay out of this.”

“You’ve really lost it,” Beverly said, looking a little worn thin. “You know you won’t be able to use anything you get, right? You could get the Ripper to confess to your face, names and all, and it would be tossed out. Vigilantes go to jail, Will.”

Will held his hands up. He was expecting some pushback, so he wasn’t dissuaded.

“I’m not looking to interfere,” he explained. “I just want to observe. I’ll be there anyway.”

“So why not go to Jack? Why not get protection?” Beverly countered.

“The Ripper hasn’t contacted me," Will said. “Most likely it’ll come to nothing.”

It was enough of a non-answer that Beverly sat back in her chair and crossed her arms.

“I may also be on a short suspension,” Will added. “Just because of the use of force.”

“Jesus. Okay. So you come to me about this because you know Jack won’t put it through the normal channels?” she asked.

Will looked up at her through his lashes, trying his best to appear hopeful and not desperate. “When have I ever asked for anything?”

There was a moment where Will was sure she was going to balk and tell him he was out of line, but it never came. Instead, she drank down the rest of her beer and went back to eating. Will mirrored her, letting the silence spill out between them.

“Might as well have you bugged,” she said, finally. “Just in case.”

“Just in case,” he agreed, trying to appear casual as his heart beat wildly in his chest.

Across town, Hannibal settled into the fanback chair in Bedelia’s office. Rain was coming down outside and the temperature had dropped overnight, so there was a fire roaring somewhere in the house. That, and the scent of cinnamon and clove reminded Hannibal how close Christmas was. She poured him a glass of Chardonnay and sat in the seat facing him.

“You’ve been involved in another murder,” she noted, taking a long sip of wine.

She’d become a bit more testy in the past months, and Hannibal wondered if that had to do with his relationship to the FBI or to Will.

“That’s an interesting way to frame a profession,” he countered.

“Law enforcement is not your profession,” she replied, just a hint of censure in her tone. “It’s your hobby, if anything. A hobby you could easily walk away from, if it weren’t for your interest in Will Graham.”

There it was. She wasn't jealous, he knew that, but there was something just under the surface. Their fates were tied and she was chewing at the rope.

"Do you consider Will a bad influence?" Hannibal asked, smiling as she shifted in her seat.

"I think he's *an* influence," she allowed. "And, I'm not sure I've ever seen someone influence you before. Not to this level. It's the unknown I'm unsure of."

Hannibal felt an anxious turn of his stomach, sitting a bit taller in its wake. "I suppose you'll find out what kind of influence he is on New Year's Eve," he said, voice tight. "He is my guest to L'Histiore du Soldat and will be joining the party after. I assume you'll be attending alone?"

It was intended as a jab, and she took it as such, mouth twisting at the implication.

"Some of us were meant to be alone, Hannibal," was her only reply.

"I believe Will used to think that way," Hannibal pressed, holding his glass out for more wine.

Bedelia paused for a moment, considering him, and then rose to bring the wine bottle to him. She stood close enough that he could smell fear just under the bright citrus edge of her perfume, and he wondered how worried he should be that she might run. Not then, of course, but perhaps after the new year.

She filled his glass halfway and then stood so he would have to look up at her when she spoke next. He let his eyes rise to her face, confident.

"Do you want to know what I believe?" she asked, continuing when he gave her an indulgent nod. "I believe the old adage that no greater desire exists than a wounded person's need for another wound. Will Graham is *wounded,* you've seen to that. Whether he recognizes the snare you've placed around his ankle or not is beside the point."

"If he is snared, then so am I," Hannibal revealed, the most honest he'd been about his current predicament with anyone. His eyes fell to his hands as he thought about it, about how trapped he really was. He took a deep breath and looked back up at her in defiance.

"Then you will drown together," she said, her entire being exuding solemnity. "I just prefer my shoes stay dry."

Chapter End Notes

Snare snare snare snare snare snare

Hannibal: you get to meet my boyfriend soon.

Bedelia: Just...keep him off the furniture.

The River

Chapter Summary

Will goes with a friend to the river and feels renewed. He still wants Hannibal.

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes

Winter had done its magic on the landscape, trees naked and sculptural, bushes dying back to reveal thistle and rough grasses. Laid bare, the network of limbs and granite outcroppings revealed patterns usually softened by lush greenery. Wolf Trap Virginia was fully under its spell, and Will Graham was no different. He led the hike to his favorite fishing spot with Ralph happily following behind.

“Look at that desire path,” Will said, pointing to the left where the native grasses, little bluestem and switchgrass, had been weaned by constant movement. Nothing as big as a deer, but groundhogs, foxes, raccoons, definitely. A hunter’s path ran to its right, but there was something just at the edge that the wildlife didn’t like, so they made another way. He found parts of himself shifting, making a way he couldn’t quite see yet, and found himself feeling more human than he had in months.

It felt like it would bleed out of him, this sudden spark of humanity, and it swelled as they made their way over a sloping hill and saw for the first time the massive flood plains and the stream valley as it led to the river. The golden underbrush, bright green ferns, and skunkweed lay under a mist of white, thanks to some flowering grass that ran throughout. Will scanned the mature chestnut oaks, red oaks, and the mockernut hickories for wildlife, and spotted his first grouping of whitetail deer.

“Deer,” he said, stopping to take a breath and pointing as Ralph came up next to him.

“When’s the last time you saw a coyote?” Ralph asked, leaning on his walking stick.

“Oh, geez,” Will said, thinking back. “Three day’s back. We see them all the time on our walks. The last one was maybe as big as a medium sized dog, gorgeous coat.”

“We’ve got muskrats out our way,” Ralph replied. “Jimmy keeps mistaking them for skunks. You know he has glasses, he’ll just never use them.”

Will laughed along with him and felt renewed. He hadn’t realized how much he needed to talk to someone who wasn't from the FBI. Ralph had texted him while he was out to dinner with Beverly, asking what his weekend plans were and they agreed to meet up.

"So you have the next two weeks off?" Ralph asked, poking around the rocks at the path's edge with a stick. "I don't know what teacher's hours are like but that sounds great."

"Yeah, I have some papers to grade, and a ton of homework as well, but I get to do it from home," Will allowed, taking a deep breath and starting down the path again. "And now I'm done Christmas shopping, I can relax. You celebrate?"

"Christmas?" Ralph asked, humor filling his words. "Celebration is too weak a word for what we do. We're atheists and all, but Jimmy loves a pageant, so Mr. Christ takes up a good two months of my life every year. I am a long suffering spouse to the season."

"Oh, sorry," Will chuckled.

"Don't worry about it," Ralph said.

"I hate this time of year," Will admitted softly, leading the way through some brush and down closer to the stream.

"It can be a bit much," Ralph agreed. "Jimmy has a child's love for Christmas music, and this time of year you can catch him humming the tune to 'All I want for Christmas is you', by Mariah Carey most times of the day."

Will laughed a bit, imagining it in his mind.

"Don't laugh, it's terrible," Ralph teased. "Have you heard someone try to hum in falsetto? Unbelievable. For two months straight."

Will continued to laugh to himself and directed them around a large group of river birch and ironwood to the rocky river's edge. Birds were everywhere going by the chatter, and Will's eyes drifted to the tree tops across the river to look for them. The trunk of a felled sycamore at the edge of the stream would be their home base for the day, so Will went about brushing down the white and tan bark and unpacking his kit.

"What's your personal beef with Christmas?" Ralph asked. "The consumerism?"

"Hit the nail on the head," Will said. "I grew up poor. There's no reminder of your economic standing more blatant than Christmas."

"I can definitely empathize with being an outsider," Ralph agreed. "What about Hannibal, though? He seems exactly like the type to have three perfectly flocked Christmas trees up and lit by now."

"Mmm, you may be right," Will said, getting his rod ready. "I guess I'll find out Christmas Eve."

Ralph mirrored his movements and got his own line ready, and they walked into the edge of the river in unison.

"Must be nice having separate places," Ralph commented. "Jimmy and I moved in together right out of the dorms. I wonder sometimes what it would have looked like to have my own

place."

Will thought about it, thought about how many hours Hannibal and him spent apart. Not that they would have moved in together anytime soon, but it was good that they didn't have shared things to split up. His stomach turned just like it did every time he thought about separating from Hannibal, something in the back of his mind trying to reason with him that it really wasn't necessary. That part of him wanted it all to be a terrible nightmare, wanted to wake tomorrow to a world where Hannibal was simply a handsome loner.

"I don't know if there was ever a time when Hannibal and I could have lived together," he said, his mind doing little wistful tricks on him. "We're so different. He lives in such extremes. I mean, talk about pageantry. I think the only place our two worlds really meet is in conversation."

"Opposites attract," Ralph suggested, adjusting his fishing rod and casting it easily.

"Well, I don't know about that. He's just *attractive.* I feel like his Lifestyles of the Rich and Famous routine was more of a hurdle than anything," Will said. "Hard to argue with the man when he wants something, though, so you can see how he's come to be such a magpie."

Something turned over in Will and he focused his eyes on the stream to try to suss it out. Nostalgia gripped him. His mind overflowed with words Hannibal had said to him, the deluge knocking the wind right out of him.

All those pretty words. That was the reality of it; Hannibal had told him everything he had ever wanted to hear. Words that felt ripped out of a Jane Austen novel, depicting longing on a scale that didn't make sense in this era, had fit perfectly on Hannibal's tongue. Will had never met anyone so steeped in metaphor, and that was what finally won him over.

The realization that it would *always* be an uphill battle to resist Hannibal gave way in him like an undertow. He could say he didn't want all of Hannibal as much as he liked, there was still a deep fear in him that no one else, for the rest of his life, would satisfy him. Not after Hannibal.

Will talked himself out of it three times before he gave in. He'd been focusing so hard on resisting temptation that he hadn't thought of what Hannibal might say, or even if he was home. It really only registered to him as impulsive as he was pulling off the street and parking next to Hannibal's Bentley behind his house, stomach turning in anticipation. At least he hadn't driven an hour for nothing.

He turned his car off and took a deep breath. He hated that he wanted to be there, but he reasoned with himself that if there was a time limit to their relationship it only made more sense to spend as much time with Hannibal as possible. He had questions he needed answered, needs that wouldn't quiet.

He got out and grabbed the cooler from the trunk of his car, walking it up the path and setting it down at the back porch before ringing the bell. He heard it ring out through the house and stuck his hands in his pockets to keep them from twitching. Hannibal's face appeared warped

through the glass etching in the door, his black eye turning yellow around the edges, and Will took a small step back as the door opened.

“Will,” Hannibal said, his whole demeanor so much softer than Will was expecting, surprise gentling him.

He was wearing a sweater for the first time WIll could remember, and seeing him look so casual pulled something tight in Will’s chest. Perhaps it was telling that he’d never been privy to this side of him. Will bent and pulled the lid up on the cooler to reveal his latest catch, packed in ice.

“You’ve caught a springer,” Hannibal said, bending eagerly to look over the steelhead. “Two pounds?”

Will stood a bit taller, allowing all the trepidation of the drive over to leave him and be replaced by pride. “Two, two-five,” he corrected, smiling under Hannibal’s appraisal.

“It’s early. That’s some luck,” Hannibal said, licking his lips and smiling at Will. “Come in. I’m honored.”

Will closed the lid on the cooler and walked into the house, breathing in the scents he’d come to associate with Hannibal; woodsmoke and clove, along with fresh pine. That answered the Christmas tree question. He already felt that pull, that need to stay, and he’d barely even entered. Hannibal closed the door behind them and led Will through to the kitchen.

“I hadn’t decided on what to cook yet tonight so this is perfect timing,” Hannibal said. “And I presume you’ll stay for dinner?”

He was giving Will an out, an opportunity to leave. He must have sensed the last bit of hesitation in Will, and adjusted for it. There was still time for the night to go another way, and Hannibal wanted him to say out loud that he wanted to stay. It should have given him some measure of pause.

“The dog’s are taken care of for the night,” he found himself saying instead, giving away just how far he intended the evening to go much too soon. It didn’t seem to matter too much by then though, as Hannibal’s small smile and nod had him humming to life.

“In that case,” Hannibal said, holding out a filet knife by the blade. “Show me what you can do.”

It shouldn’t have been that easy to get Will to jump into action, but the fondness with which the command was given had him taking the knife and pulling the fish out with an enthusiasm bordering on desperation. *Show me what you can do.* That had been Hannibal’s mantra all along, and Will felt right on that sharp edge again. He wanted to perform for this master, this king in his own kitchen, like nothing else.

Hannibal stood at his elbow as he worked, and rolled up his sleeves, preparing to take over when Will had fully cleaned the fish. Will felt him leave for a moment, but he spoke to bridge the gap.

“I’ll bake it, if you don’t mind,” Hannibal said, turning the oven on and grabbing some garlic and a lemon from the counter. “Butter, lemon, garlic. I can make some rice and steamed vegetables for the sides.”

Will hummed his agreement and the prepping started in earnest. Hannibal pulled a rice cooker out from one of the cabinets and set it going before coming to look back over Will’s shoulder. Will paused at the hand on the back of his neck, but melted into it soon enough, his hands frozen in their work. Hannibal leaned in and breathed in at his neck and Will let his eyes close.

“You’ve always impressed me, Will,” Hannibal said, his breath hot against Will's neck. "I hope you know that."

When he pulled away Will wanted to move with him. He took a deep breath to steady himself and got back to work.

“I’m glad to see you took my advice,” Hannibal said, slicing a lemon and getting the garlic ready. “How was your day at the river?”

“Renewing,” Will admitted. “I feel more myself than I have in a while.”

“I’m glad to hear it,” Hannibal replied.

They fell into a natural silence after that and worked in tandem to make dinner, Will taking up all the dicing after he’d finished cleaning the fish. It felt good to be close to Hannibal, as natural as anything.

Chapter End Notes

Will, talking to Hannibal: fucking hell, son of a bitch

Will talking to his new friend Ralph: oh geez

I Want To Keep You

Chapter Summary

> Will has a crisis of something over drinks and Hannibal resolves to give Will something to remember.

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes

It was halfway through dessert, a lemon tart Hannibal had made the night before, that Will was pulled out of the comfort of the quiet night. He had almost forgotten about the tux until Hannibal brought it up.

“My tailor can come to your house,” Hannibal explained. “Or we could meet in town at his shop on Monday afternoon. I've already given him your measurements and he’ll have three suits for you to try on.”

“I thought we were just going to rent something,” Will replied, uneasy at the thought of the cost of one, let alone multiple suits.

“It isn’t a burden,” Hannibal insisted. “You’ll have the chance to wear a good suit in the future, I’m sure. It would also afford me the opportunity to see you sometime this week, before Christmas Day. I’m going to miss our mornings together.”

It was the first time Will regretted the week off, and he chewed that over internally. Friday had been their last breakfast on campus for a good two weeks and he suddenly wondered how he was meant to fill the time. He didn’t even remember what he used to do for breakfast before Hannibal and his usual weekend morning cup of coffee and slice of toast looked like a bleak prospect.

“Monday then,” he said, thinking over the week in his head.

Hannibal nodded and bussed the table, leaving Will to stare up at the painting of Leda and the Swan above the dining room table. It looked even more erotic in the low lighting and flicker of candles. Leda wasn’t at all apprehensive, and he tried to put himself in that mindset. He would enjoy what Hannibal saw fit to give him.

After a few drinks Will felt like he was being pulled back into the dream. Hannibal was showing him this soft version of life he could have, the lights low and voices hushed. It was like their first night together, warmed by firelight and right on the edge of something vulnerable. He let himself be taken in by the ruse, by the suggestion that the night could go on forever, and held his glass up so Hannibal could fill it again with the good whiskey.

“Let's take this into the sitting room,” Hannibal said, standing and pulling Will’s hand into his after topping up his drink.

Will just hummed in response and allowed himself to be walked down the hall, eyes catching on the candle sconces on the way, wondering when Hannibal had time to light them all. His eyes had to adjust once they made it to the green room, the fire there burning bright between two sparsely decorated and lit trees. Ralph would be proud of the restraint.

They sat together on the chesterfield, Will facing away so he didn’t have to make eye contact with the taxidermy above the fireplace. It was some exotic deer and its beady eyes seemed to follow him from beneath those sculptural horns. Hannibal bracketed his back, arm snaking around his waist, and rested his cheek against Will’s temple. It was such an intimate position that Will felt himself tear up. He was back to feeling so fucking small he could barely stand it.

"The new year is coming up fast," he said, tone brushing up against melancholy, voice tight.

"And you fear the changing of the guards?" Hannibal asked, his nose brushing through Will's hair.

"Time marches on, and I have decisions to make," Will admitted vaguely.

"Do those decisions have to take you from here, tonight?" Hannibal asked. It was another offer, another chance to leave everything behind and exist in a bubble of their own making.

"I wish life were that simple," Will replied. "I wish my enjoyment wasn't tangled up in everything else. I feel like I’ve tried to lay down roots in a field full of landmines."

Hannibal took a long sip of his wine. It was clear he was weighing his words and Will wondered if he really understood the enormity of what they were talking about. He was blinking back tears, some wretched thing crawling up his throat.

He didn't want to put Hannibal away anymore than he had wanted to jail the Ripper. With clarity now he knew the banality of the prison system was too confining for such a man. *Wouldn't it be better to have a duel?* Dying from a gunshot wound wasn't a pretty thing, but it would surely be more fitting than Hannibal wasting away in a cage.

He imagined the nakiri knife he’d bought the night before, shining in the lights of Hannibal's kitchen, gripped in his own hand. He felt the knife slice through Hannibal's side, his shirt giving way, (easy, *too easy)* blood pouring down. He blinked and it was gone.

"Is there…" Will paused. The room felt like it was shrinking around him and he imagined himself crawling into the fireplace to burn up like that lost boy. He was afraid of what might come out of his mouth, but that didn’t stop his subconscious from announcing itself to the room. “Do you think there's a world where I don't end up dying alone?"

Oh, it was worse than he had anticipated. The sentence fell from his lips and he was shaking with a sudden and deafening fear, the hand on his waist an invasion as he tried to crawl out of his skin. Stripped away from everything else was the real question. Hannibal would be gone,

and he would be alone again, and he'd die that way. That, he felt with rushing clarity, was his destiny.

"There are undoubtedly many," Hannibal allowed, his voice gentle, more forgiving than Will wanted. "Your solitude is a choice, as it always has been."

Well, that's fucking terrible news, Will thought.

"And yours?" Will asked, grabbing for some sort of purchase. "How long were you alone before you met me? Your reputation was pretty well set as a bachelor."

"I've had lovers," Hannibal said, "but I'm sure that's not what you mean."

Will shook his head and took a swig of his drink, closing his eyes and letting Hannibal nose around his ear a bit more as he steadied his breathing.

"I'm not an easy man to be with," Hannibal allowed, talking around the question as he often did. "I lose interest in most people quickly, and I can be very demanding."

"How long?" Will couldn't look at him, didn't know what he might give away, and his voice sounded timid to his own ears.

He wanted to know that he was the exception, that he wasn't just another in a long list of peculiar lovers. If he was going to be the one to take Hannibal down, he also wanted to be the only one who could have done so. He wanted to own Hannibal, as the man clearly owned him.

"There was someone else," Hannibal replied. "A long time ago, when I was in my twenties. I fantasized that she would leave her husband, but it wasn't to be. They're still together to this day, in fact."

Will tried to imagine the type of woman Hannibal would fall for, but couldn't. Hell, he couldn't even understand why Hannibal was attracted to *him.*

"You've led a lonely life," he whispered, not sure if he was speaking to himself or Hannibal. They were bleeding together in his mind again. His sense of self felt taffy-soft, malleable.

"I'd like for you to remain by my side, even though I do understand your need to keep to your current path," Hannibal replied, kissing along his neck, behind his ear. "As I said, demanding."

Will turned and kissed him to bottle up his sorrow, sick of oscillating between saying too much or crying. Hannibal hummed against his lips and allowed him to tease into his mouth with his tongue, to drag it deep, hand clutched possessively on Hannibal's shoulder.

They fell into a lazy rhythm and Will finally got his hands on that red sweater, soft knit over hot skin. He felt muscle twitch below and pushed up under the hem to run his hands up Hannibal's abdomen. He had a flash image of the knife going in, *in.*

"Come to bed," Hannibal said, drawing back and breathing deeply. "Leave the contemplation here, let me make you feel good."

And really, Will thought, who could possibly say no to such an offer?

As he led them upstairs Hannibal finally understood what Will came for that night. He was playing a cruel game. He was pulling at the seams where they were connected, anticipating his next actions in a way that gave them away for what they would truly be; betrayal.

He was forecasting that betrayal with every move, every nervous glance. Hannibal had known that it was a possibility as far back as the night Will had called him and spoke of the bleeding thing inside him. Now he clearly knew Hannibal was the Ripper and was trying to figure out how to separate himself from him. As long as the veil stayed up, as long as they didn't discuss it, Will could pretend there was still a choice, but they both knew he'd already made it.

He'd called Hannibal selfish, but here he was seeking out what he was planning to reject. Hannibal could imagine the train of thought, could extrapolate from there when Will planned to cut him off. Off, or out, like a growth on an organ. Two weeks until Hannibal would be a mass of tissue on a tray to Will, two weeks until he would be disposed of as Will's saw fit.

Would you try to kill me? he wanted to ask. *Would you take my life, or leave me to uncle Jack?*

It was probably the latter, but two could play at that game. For now, he would give Will something to think of in the upcoming cold nights.

"On the bed," he murmured, pushing Will towards it and standing back to strip.

"Do you-" Will tried.

Hannibal cut him off with a finger to his lips and a stern look that had Will shuffling up onto the bed on his knees, so eager to obey that he would dirty the bed with his shoes. He seemed to have the same realization and reached down to unlace them before anything else.

"Your mouth is running away with you," Hannibal said sternly, removing his suit jacket and starting on the cuffs of his shirt, movements exact. "It will find something to worry, if you allow it. I'm going to suggest for once that you don't. Leave it, Will."

Will's eyes shot up to meet his, a flush creeping up his cheeks at the curt command. Surely, it was a phrase he used on occasion with his dogs. His mouth turned but he gave a short nod and continued quietly to remove his shoes and socks.

"What lies ahead doesn't matter," Hannibal continued. "You are to focus solely on the here and now, on my body and yours."

Will's mouth twisted with unsaid words and Hannibal felt a swelling of pride in his chest. It fueled his arousal to feel Will's indecision finally *give* under his command and he felt his

cock twitch eagerly.

“Perfect,” he murmured, removing his shirt and watching as Will silently folded his clothes and set them aside.

There was an anticipation in Will's frame that he wanted to ease, so he stepped out of his pants and knelt between Will’s legs at the edge of the bed. He rested his cheek on Will’s inner thigh, gazing up at him and rubbing his face back and forth to catch the short hairs there. As expected, Will sighed and brushed the hair back from his forehead, fingers gentle and warm. Hannibal let the eye contact break to kiss a hot trail up Will’s thigh to his stomach, careful to remain on his knees, in supplication.

He took his time, nosing around Will’s stomach and mouthing his cock through the cotton of his boxers. By the time he stood again Will was eager and compliant, shucking his boxers and scrambling back on the bed to make room for him. Hannibal got rid of his briefs and climbed over Will, bracketing his smaller hips with his knees and leaning down to seal their lips together.

Will rolled his hips and for the first time Hannibal’s arousal broke through. He grunted and gripped both their cocks in his fist, staring down as the heads eased through the circle of his pointer finger and thumb. He grunted again, bending down to lick a hot trail along Will’s chest, finding a pebbled nipple and closing his lips around it.

“Fuck,” Will hissed, jolting with a shock as Hannibal kissed up his chest to his neck.

“Quiet now,” Hannibal murmured, letting go of their pricks to grip Will’s balls and tug them gently. He laughed at the choked off noise Will made, the way he arched in response, and pressed his thumb further back.

Will moaned and shifted his hips, then reached down and gripped Hannibal's wrist, held it steady as he ground down on it. He let out a gasp as Hannibal’s thumb pressed into him, just barely breaching, and closed his eyes tight.

It was confirmation enough for Hannibal, and he pulled away to get the lube and a condom from the bedside table. Will looked utterly lost; hair wild, mouth wet and lips parted. Hannibal opened the lube and spread some out on his fingers, kneeling up between Will’s legs.

“Do you want to feel it?” he asked, gripping Will in a slick fist before sliding the first finger down behind Will’s balls, circling his hole. Will nodded and Hannibal pressed in easily, slipping into that heat.

Will made little hiccupping sounds, mouth open and eyelids drooping. Hannibal bent in half and sucked the slick head of Will’s cock into his mouth as he added another finger, tonguing at the first drops of precome. Will rocked against his hand, rolling his hips in little aborted motions, and Hannibal felt his hair caught in a sudden grip. He pulled back, wiping his mouth against his shoulder, and Will’s hand fell from his hair to tighten around the base of his cock, staving off orgasm.

He stilled and waited until Will let go and lay back, hands at his sides, then removed his fingers and rolled the condom on. He poured a bit of lube onto his cock, giving it a slow pull, and then bent to press the head to Will's hole. Will took a deep breath and started to stroke himself, relaxing so Hannibal could push in the first few inches.

Hannibal looked down to where they met, watching Will's rim stretch to accommodate him, hips rolling in circles to ease his way in. The grip nearly took him over the edge. It was more intense than the last time, without the adrenaline of a fresh crime scene, and he couldn't help the moan he let out when Will's legs wrapped around his waist.

"Good?" he asked, leaning forward on his elbows and searching Will's face for a response.

Will nodded, reaching up to card his fingers through Hannibal's hair, thumb tracing his jaw. Hannibal let himself be pulled into a hot kiss and started driving into him in earnest, hips snapping forward at an even pace. Every movement seemed to pull a new sound from Will and Hannibal drew back far enough to look him in the eye.

"I want you," Hannibal said, unable to stop the curling of his lip.The truth had teeth. "I want to keep you."

Will's eyes rolled back in his head and he tightened his legs around Hannibal. He tilted his hips so that the head of Hannibal's cock grazed against the right spot in him on each thrust, and gripped his own prick in a loose fist. Hannibal felt his orgasm growing, felt the need to crawl as deeply into Will's body as he could, some misguided urge to plant his seed where it might take root. He felt Will flutter around him, his body tipping past the point of no return.

Will whined and tightened his fist, his body clenching around Hannibal as he came across his own chest, and Hannibal bent to lick up every bit of it, desperate to possess more of Will by any means necessary. His hips were moving out of his control, pumping into Will at a pace he surely couldn't keep up for much longer, chasing the heat coiling in the core of him.

Will placed his hand on Hannibal's face, thumb brushing over his lower lip, and Hannibal buried himself deep, letting his orgasm roll over him in tightening waves until he was spent and falling to the side to breathe in against Will's armpit. Will allowed it, his breath still coming in pained little pants, and Hannibal tasted him, burying his face deep in that crook and breathing greedily. By the gentle sounds Will was making, he'd done his job.

Chapter End Notes

Will, having a bad day: welp, time to climb into that fireplace and die forever I guess 👑🤷

Hannibal...what are you planning my bro?

Too Close

Chapter Summary

Hannibal starts his campaign to throw suspicion on Will by contacting Jack.

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes

Hannibal watched Will's car pull out of the drive and then walked to the safe in his study. He opened it with practiced movements, turning the dial this way and that, and withdrew three plastic bags. One was filled with the spent casings from Stammets' rifle, collected the night after the incident while Will slept in his guest room. He placed it on the desk and looked over the other two bags, each holding a black screened cellphone. The one that Stammets had used to plan his attack on Will was a flimsy thing, the kind you pay for minutes on. Will's phone had a crack in the screen, and felt heavy in his hand.

He imagined the scene again, as he had hundreds of times since it had transpired. Will, drugged and belted into the passenger side of his own sedan, being driven for at least an hour away from home. Was he unconscious the whole time, or did he feel the minutes like pricks of a needle, each one taking him farther from safety? He thought about Stammets typing out a message to Hannibal from Will's phone, fingers sliding across the screen as he drove with one hand and typed with the other. He wondered if Stammets had been just as chatty with Will, if he'd told Will he was contacting Hannibal. Did he brag to Will about luring Hannibal, and if he did was there a moment in Will's consciousness where he'd called out to Hannibal to save him?

It left a bitter taste in his mouth. All that work to save Will, all his prowess put into taking down and then resurrecting Stammmets, all the effort to give Will everything he wanted, wasted. But, he reminded himself, it still wasn't the end. He may have lost the battle, but the war was on his home turf, and he felt a certain confidence wash over him as he picked up his own phone and called Jack Crawford.

Jack sat across from Hannibal at his dining room table and sipped the coffee Hannibal had plied him with. He had been gruff at the door, but softened when he saw Hannibal's demeanor. Now he was politely waiting to find out why he was summoned to Hannibal's house on an early Sunday morning.

"You told me to be your canary, Jack," Hannibal explained, hands twisting a dark green cloth napkin. "I'm afraid I need to sound an alarm of sorts."

“This is about Will,” Jack asked, looking more surprised than he had any right to. “What’s happening?”

Good. Jack’s reaction showed he was open to accepting that things had finally gone wrong with Will. All Hannibal had to do was fill that want.

“There’s information I’ve been keeping to myself,” he explained. “About Will.”

Jack’s hand went reflexively to the pocket that held his notepad and Hannibal gave him a pleading look.

“Just listen, please,” Hannibal said. “I don’t know what this all means, and I’m worried about Will. Let me explain this to you as a friend before anything else. It’s quite possible I’m losing my mind.”

“I’m sure it’s not that,” Jack said, hands going back to his coffee mug. “What’s wrong?”

Hannibal explained to Jack that Will had summoned him away to his office the night the Ripper killed Stammets. He described a man shaking and losing time, a man who had driven from Wolf Trap without realizing it. He described a man who’d been in a fight.

“And Will told you not to tell anyone?” Jack asked plainly.

“Will insists he be seen as capable. His fear of appearing in distress has informed many of his decisions,” Hannibal answered vaguely.

“Okay, so are we talking about a mental break?” Jack asked, trying to understand.

“I suspect it’s encephalitis. He’s been losing blocks of time and hallucinating recently. This fever has been going on for months, but it’s getting worse, Jack.”

“Okay,” Jack repeated.

“Sleepwalking, aggression. I know that you’ve seen the rise in unexplained behavior, I’m just trying to give it context,” Hannibal said.

“And the context is encephalitis,” Jack tried, not catching on.

“Encephalitis is the revealing factor,” Hannibal corrected. “The context is the Chesapeake Ripper. I think he’s gotten too close, Jack.”

Recounting it that night to Bella was a strange experience. It was like Jack was trying to explain the plot of a movie he’d just seen, and he was missing the overarching themes.

“So Hannibal thinks Will is colluding with the Ripper, but doesn’t want that on the record. I’m confused,” Bella said, leaning back against the pillows.

“There’s some weird stuff going on there,” Jack said. “He still wants to believe Will isn’t totally willing in this, because of the illness. Might be battered partner syndrome. There’s

always been this undercurrent of violence between them. Will gave him a black eye, remember I told you he had that bad black eye?"

"Oh, honey," Bella said, sympathetic. "I remember that got in your head. It was right after that woman was killed and the case closed."

"The night after," Jack agreed. "Will called Hannibal to his hotel room and he was seeing things, hallucinations. I mean, auditory as well as visual. He's sick enough that If he's in contact with the Ripper, he could be influenced."

Bella thought about it for a moment, eyes closing. Jack waited for her to come up with words, knowing she would see something he couldn't. He was too in the weeds.

"You know, living out there in the middle of nowhere with all those dogs," she said, nodding to herself, "there's a lot that wouldn't be seen. There's always been something wrong with him, hasn't there? Maybe it was more than any of us could see."

"He's peculiar, I just don't believe he'd help a killer," Jack said, frustrated.

"Didn't he specifically come back to work on the Ripper case? Maybe you just don't want to see it," Bella replied, taking his hand and kissing his knuckles. "If he's guilty of something, love, there will be evidence. All you have to do is figure out the angle. What's your angle?"

"Hannibal said...he said he mentioned his distaste of the conductor at the Lyric to Will less than a week before he was killed," Jack said, remembering the moment he started to believe Hannibal might be right. "If Will was in contact with the Ripper, he'll have left signs. We have to go over the evidence again."

Hannibal pulled off a winding drive and stopped halfway down an access road, leading onto the back lot of Will's property. He let the rental car putter away as he took his bolt cutters from the trunk. There was a chain across the path, a private property sign hanging from it, and he clipped it off with ease and pulled it out of the way. There would be no cars or people passing through, and the cover of dark would be enough to keep him hidden from afar.

It was freezing out and it bit at Hannibal's cheeks as he walked back to the car, he was grateful to be bundled up in such weather. His destination was a good five minute drive and then he'd be back out in the cold. The path was tree lined, chestnut oaks rising on each side. He could hear the pops of their acorns under his tires as he made his way past the corridor of gray trunks and out towards the lake.

He crested a hill and moonlight spilled out in the valley, the lake appearing in front of him clearly. It was only the second time he'd been to it since he had driven Stammets' car into it, what felt like years ago. He parked the car and went to the trunk again, this time taking out the cell phone he'd taken from Stammets' body and removing it from the plastic bag. He held down the power button, his finger slipping a bit because of the gloves he was wearing over his leather layer.

He walked to the edge of the lake, where the bulrushes and sea oats were just beginning to grow back, and tossed the phone in among their tangled roots. He took a moment to imagine the car below the surface of the water, wondering how much the submersion had deteriorated any evidence of Will in the passenger seat. It didn't matter, because the license plates would link the car to Stammets and the phone would show searches and directions to Hannibal's office. All he had to do next was return the rental, go home, and call in the dumping at the lake from a burner phone.

He took a moment to congratulate himself for keeping the evidence. He hadn't wanted to believe he would need the backup, hadn't wanted to think Will would get too close. There was still a side of him that was proud of Will for figuring it out so quickly, and he thought about taking a detour on the way out. He was really only about five minutes away from Will's house, and if he wound back through the main road he could sit in his rental car and watch it from afar. It might have been nice to see the lights of the house the way Will did on his nightly walks, but it was too much of a risk. He was getting sentimental again, and that wouldn't do.

He slipped back into the rental and pulled it onto the access road, heading back to the entrance. He parked the car just on the other side of the cut chain and hopped out. Just like before, he used his own hammer to work out the broken piece of chain and then pried the railroad tie out of the wooden pole and hammered the chain back up. No one would notice a few missing links. He slipped back in the car and drove in the direction of the highway. It would be best to get back home before it got too late. He knew he would get a call in a few hours when Will's day wound down.

That was a new occurrence, the nightly calls. It started up after they returned from North Carolina, with Will calling him just to say he was getting into bed for the night. It was something he'd miss during their upcoming separation, so he wanted to be conscious enough to set it to memory.

Will called just as he was walking in the door. He picked up his phone and answered it, removing his tie and sitting down at the kitchen counter.

"Hello, Will."

Will hummed through the line. "How was your day?" he asked, sounding sleepy.

"Good, just tying up a few loose ends," Hannibal replied, smiling to himself. "And what about yourself?"

Chapter End Notes

Project FRAME WILL GRAHAM (so that no one will believe him when he says Hannibal is the Ripper) is underway.

Yikes (pronounced like Nike's)

Feast

Chapter Summary

Will is put through the ringer and presented with a feast at the end of the week.

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes

There was something different about Hannibal. Will could feel it the second he met him on the street outside the tailor's. He smiled in greeting, but there was something calculated about it.

"You okay?" Will asked, keeping his voice quiet as they entered the shop.

"Is there a reason I shouldn't be?" Hannibal replied, smile growing wider.

There was a flash, just a flash of something, and then it was gone.

They were ushered in, and Will split from Hannibal to follow the tailor into the back room. He tried on three different suits, all prepped for him, but he couldn't tell what they looked like. He looked at himself in the full length mirror and the only thing he could see was the change in Hannibal's eyes. It was like a light had been snuffed, and Will could no longer see the inner workings.

It bothered him the whole ride home, too. His car felt empty, the air around him stale, and he couldn't escape the feeling that he'd lost Hannibal's favor. His stomach was tied in knots, and he fought with himself to wait until he got home to call him.

There was an itch running through him and his mind happily supplied a list of graphic responses that might come from falling out of favor with the devil himself. The body of the conductor, emptied out and sitting on a stage sprang to mind. Stammets with his mouth full of moths. *He felt a knife in his side, looked down to see Hannibal's hand gripping the handle, the knife pushing deeper.*

He shook off the vision, pulled the car up to his house and turned it off. His hands shook against the steering wheel and he tried to focus on his breaths, something a high school guidance counselor had first taught him. He concentrated on the feeling of his lungs expanding in his chest, the knife flicking in and out of his consciousness. He tried not to chase the thought, tried to let it go.

Inside, after he'd walked the dogs and had a sandwich for lunch, he sat in his old armchair in front of the window and dialed Hannibal's number.

“Hello, Will,” Hannibal answered. “Did you not get enough of me at the tailor?”

Will swallowed hard and took a deep breath. He’d been trying so hard to see Hannibal as the Ripper, to sew the separate pieces of him together so that he could react appropriately to the reality of the man in front of him. What he forgot to account for was how terrifying it would be to realize that Hannibal *knew.* He wanted to go back to being confused, he wanted to hang up the phone.

“I wanted to hear your voice,” he said instead. *To find out who you are now,* he thought.

“And what would you like me to say, Will?” Hannibal asked, as indulgent as he was chastising.

“I’m not sure,” Will replied, unsettled.

“I’m working on securing everything for our dinner,” Hannibal explained. “It takes quite a bit of planning to put on a feast, as I’m sure you can imagine. Why don’t you call me back when you know what you want from me? Or perhaps I’ll just see you for dinner on Christmas.”

Will felt his stomach drop, fresh humiliation spreading through him. He didn’t know what to say to that. He felt rejected, denied.

“Yeah, I’ll, I’ll see you on Christmas,” he murmured weakly.

“Six o’clock, Will,” Hannibal reminded him. “You don’t want to keep me waiting.”

Will sputtered a few words in parting, and sat looking at his phone in his hand, wondering what he should do. He decided to drown his flush of emotions in whiskey.

Christmas Day came to Wolf Trap Virginia blanketed in freshly fallen snow, picturesque and desolate at the same time. Most of the dogs were happy for a romp in the snow, and even happier to try to track it through the house.

“Don’t even think of it,” Will said, reaching for the towel to dry off paws and blocking the doorway. “One at a time, come on.”

Will spent the day cleaning the house, his mind spinning with what might happen at dinner. He felt like a prey animal. Living up to his threat, Hannibal hadn’t contacted him since they spoke earlier in the week, and Will had been too chicken shit to call him. He’d kept himself busy with grading papers and homework, logging into the college computer system to update grades and amend the syllabus. And he cleaned.

The driveway barely needed to be shoveled but Will stayed out working on it for a whole hour as the afternoon waned. By the time four-thirty rolled around and he needed to shower and get dressed, his whole body ached with the feeling of really putting it to good use. He hopped in the shower and tried to psych himself up.

Hannibal wouldn’t hurt him, at least Hannibal wouldn’t hurt him before the opera. He wanted to show Will off, and Will knew that on some level. That was surely why he’d insisted on

buying three suits for him, dressing him up like a doll. He climbed the stairs to the second floor bedroom and went to look through his shirts. He had a clean white button up that would look fine with the navy blue suit that had just been tailored, so he pulled it from his hanger and went to the three hanging garment bags near the back of the closet.

He had to admit he looked good, admiring himself in the bathroom mirror and fussing with his hair. He wondered if he should have gotten a haircut earlier in the week. His hair was getting long enough to curl over the collar of his shirt, and it looked a bit unkempt in comparison to the new suit. He pulled an old pot of pomade from his medicine cabinet, but threw it away after he smelled it; it had that plastic smell of expired chemicals.

"Okay guys," he said to the dogs as he collected his bag and made his way to the door. "Dan is coming over in a couple of hours to give you dinner, and I'll be home in the morning."

Buster walked up to him and sat down, giving him a lonesome stare. Will knelt and held his paw when it was offered. They stayed there a moment before Will pulled away to leave, locking the door behind him.

He listened to a podcast about deep sea life on the drive over. He had to give himself something to focus on, or he might give in and drive back home. The last thing he wanted to do was lose his nerve.

The snow had come back around noon, and fell until two, which meant there was still moisture on the roads. Since it was the first snow of the year, people had completely forgotten how to drive in it and he passed no fewer than three accidents on the way. There was a little voice in his head that told him it would be easy to just drive his car into a tree, that it wouldn't really look like a suicide. He was sick of that little voice.

He pulled his car into the driveway when he got to Hannibal's and parked next to the Bently, as usual. His hands only shook slightly as he turned the car off and grabbed his bag, and settled on his way up to Hannibal's back door. He could already smell the fire going, and looked up briefly to see smoke billowing from the chimney near the back of the house. He rang the doorbell and prepared himself as best he could.

Hannibal opened the door and paused, taking a moment to look Will over. "Blue is a beautiful color on you. Come in."

Will followed him into the house and towards the kitchen, where of course Hannibal was well into cooking. Will took a seat near the counter and hung his bag over the back of the chair.

"I've missed you dearly," Hannibal said, going to stir something in a pot on the stove. "I take it you haven't found an answer to my question, since you've been so quiet."

Will shrugged and tried to think back to their phone call, trying to remember what Hannibal had said to him.

"Remind me again what the question was," he said, feeling wrongfooted and slow.

Hannibal picked up a plate of hors d'oeuvres and brought them to Will. He held out the plate and Will took one, avocado and cheese on a baked sliced baguette.

“I simply wondered,” Hannibal said, stepping closer and causing Will to sit up a bit more in his chair, “what it is that you want from me. We’ve come upon a crossroads, haven’t we?”

Will swallowed as Hannibal set the plate down on the counter, and stepped between his knees. He was stuck, his mouth feeling uncomfortably dry as Hannibal rested his hand gently on his cheek.

“You have decisions to make, I know,” Hannibal continued, a bit softer. “I just want you to know where I stand.”

“And, uh, where *do* you stand?” Will asked, eyes fluttering, trying to close.

“I will give myself to you, over and over,” Hannibal said, his eyes intense. “I will not stop, no matter how you may beg.”

On one level Will knew that was a threat, that Hannibal’s affection came with the Ripper’s bloodlust, and he should be afraid, but his body was reacting to Hannibal in the usual manner and he couldn’t say no when Hannibal pressed his thumb between his lips.

Hannibal caught his jaw with his fingers, thumb like a hook pressing under his tongue, and turned his head to the side. His face was unreadable.

“Your hair is getting long,” he said, sending a chill through Will’s body. “You are more beautiful than the day we met.”

Will couldn’t reply, could only let Hannibal press down under his tongue and look him over. The calculation he had seen in Hannibal on Monday was gone, a growing hunger taking its place, and Will felt himself floating.

Hannibal let him go and stood back, allowing him to take a breath.

“Wash your hands now,” he commanded. “Your place is set at the table.”

Will wasn’t used to being sent out of the kitchen, and looked over his shoulder as he left, the hair standing up on the back of his neck.

Out of Hannibal’s orbit, Will could finally really take in the scents and sounds of the house. Rosemary, garlic, onion, something hot, plus turkey or chicken, and roast beef. It was what he imagined heaven must smell like; a never ending kitchen. He’d even seen three cakes amongst the small bites on the stainless steel kitchen cart.

He washed his hands and closed his eyes. He felt drunk already, on Hannibal, on the ambiance of the place. He turned off the tap and dried his hands, holding the plush hand towel to his nose and breathing in against it. Fortified, he went to the dining room.

The table was covered in food. A goose, duck, chicken, and some sort of other guinea fowl ran down the center, buffeted on each side by crispy thinly sliced fingerling potatoes and

sweet potato hash, green beans and gravy, and two kinds of rolls. Will took his seat to the right of the head if the table, and picked up his fork, tapping it against his plate.

Hannibal walked through the doorway with a cranberry, pear and lemon rind dish in one hand and a baked Brie in the other.

“This is outrageous,” Will said, chuckling a little.

Hannibal smiled at him and disappeared again. Will tried to anticipate what was coming next and hoped it was more of those toast things Hannibal had given him. He didn’t even notice that his anticipation was gone.

“Crostini,” Hannibal said, presenting Will with the plate he’d been thinking of. “Avocado, mascarpone, provolone. Topped with either prosciutto, sautéed wild mushroom, or shrimp.”

“Yes, please,” Will said, taking one right away with prosciutto.

Hannibal left again, and again, until every open spot on the table was filled. When he finally came in with a bottle of wine and two glasses, Will had sated his initial hunger and was trying to think about how it would be best to get through the feast.

“You start with the salad,” Hannibal said, reading his mind. “Bibb lettuce, from my own garden, a vinaigrette with shallots, and-“

“Pomegranate seeds,” Will finished, trying not to smile.

“From the local farm down the street. They also gave us the buddhas hand and Meyer lemon for our spiced hot fruit bake,” Hannibal said, smiling playfully. “Try a sun-dried pesto bite.”

Will picked up one of the perfectly formed phyllo dough shells and bit into it. It was difficult to not just pick up another when he was done, but he wanted to finish his salad.

“When you said you wanted to gorge me,” Will said, “I didn’t imagine it would be on Christmas goose.”

“You don’t often suffer from a lack of imagination,” Hannibal noted, filling Will’s wine glass and his own.

“Well, you just happen to be my blind spot,” Will said, a bit too truthful. “Would you suggest I pick my favorite dishes out and eat a good amount of them, or take a small serving of everything?”

Hannibal smiled again at him, letting him know it was the right question. “Usually, I would say to go with your preference, but tonight I think we’ll go with mine. You must try every dish, the amount you wish to consume is up to you. It’s all or nothing, I’m afraid.”

“And if I circle the table with a spoon, carving out a single bite of each dish?” Will asked, finding himself teasing.

“That would be unthinkably rude,” Hannibal considered, smiling fondly at him. “Let me do the work.”

“This is really something else,” Will said, “everything smells amazing. Thank you.”

The wine was good, sweet, and he found himself already finishing his glass. Hannibal reached across him with the bottle and filled it again as he held it steady.

“Go ahead,” Hannibal said. “I want you to enjoy yourself. Let my bounty again be yours.”

Will held his glass up, suddenly realizing what they hadn’t said. “Merry Christmas, Hannibal.”

Hannibal tapped his own glass against it, the bright ring harmonizing briefly with the music.

“Merry Christmas, Will,” Hannibal replied, nodding his head and starting in on his food.

Chapter End Notes

Feast Feast Feast

Guilty Pleasure

Chapter Summary

Hannibal helps Will to be a little more honest about his wants, and tightens the snare.

Chapter Notes

There be dragons:
drugging

See the end of the chapter for more notes

“This isn’t real,” Will murmured, his voice smaller than it usually was, hesitant.

He was more beautiful than he’d ever been, glasses tossed aside and head rolling back on his neck. His lips parted, pink tongue easing out to wet them. Hannibal took interest in his Adam's apple bobbing as he tried to find words, lips moving in little aborted motions. His eyes, when they blinked open, were glassy.

Sensation burst out over Hannibal and he had to force himself back into control. He had to hold the reins now, because Will was dipping just below the edge of consciousness, and he didn’t want to lose him completely yet. He held his hand out and snapped his fingers in front of Will’s eyes.

“What’s that, Will?” he prompted, dishing out a fresh slice of cake. “Chocolate cinnamon ganache. Go ahead.”

Will looked down at his plate and then back up at Hannibal, confused. Hannibal smiled down at him and set down the serving spatula and cake, cupping Will’s face in his hands and sitting on the edge of the dining room table to face his seat. He brushed the hair back from Will’s brow and felt his forehead. He was a little hot.

“Let’s get you more comfortable,” Hannibal said, loosening Will’s tie and unbuttoning the top two buttons of his shirt. He’d lost his jacket maybe twenty minutes before. “That’s better, isn’t it?”

Will nodded, a compulsion Hannibal was sure. *Yes, sir,* that nod said. Hannibal could see Will as a child, even more constrained by tradition.

“Tell me what you said before,” Hannibal directed.

Will seemed stuck in time and Hannibal reached into his pocket impulsively for his phone. He pulled it out and pressed a button on the side, opening the camera app, the focus catching and losing Will's face as he vibrated in his seat. He would draw Will later like this, rendering his distress in charcoal and graphite.

Each drop of perspiration was a personal victory, and Hannibal ran his thumb across Will's forehead in a wide stroke and pressed it to his tongue to taste it. The salt was a revelation, shocking him with its hard edge and he leaned forward to lick a stripe up Will's temple to his hairline.

"It's not real," Will repeated, humming more contently.

"Your brain is attempting to adjust itself to a cocktail of chemicals. I gave you something that interrupts the transmission of memory from short-term to long-term storage. It must be unsettling to experience a reality that can't be recorded. You may feel as though you are not anchored in your body," Hannibal explained calmly. "That is possibly the unreality you're relaying."

Will blinked at him and lifted his fork up to his lips, almost all frosting. His eyebrows shot up when he tasted it and Hannibal felt alive again. No matter what changed, Will enjoyed his cooking. It was an achievement, surely.

"Have some water," Hannibal said, holding the glass up for Will to grip it.

"This," Will said between gulps, voice sleepy, "is the best water I've ever had."

Hannibal chuckled and Will joined in, smiling crookedly. He let Hannibal take the glass back and set it down, but gripped at his fingers when they let go of the glass.

"You are being very agreeable, little bird," Hannibal murmured.

"It's Christmas," Will said, his eyes falling closed.

"Don't go anywhere. Come back to me," Hannibal encouraged, squeezing Will's hand. Will nodded, but didn't open his eyes. "Would you like to go to the study and let me sketch you?"

"Yeah, sure," Will slurred, his shoulders shrugging.

Hannibal helped Will walk down the hall to the study and laid him out on the chaise lounge. He was mumbling something to himself, not necessarily distressed, but having trouble processing. Hannibal left his side to light a fire in the fireplace, grateful that he'd thought to set up the logs that morning. Snow was falling again outside, and the far side of the house would get uncomfortably cold if he didn't keep on it. That's what you got with that many floor to ceiling windows, apparently.

When he was finally seated with pad and pencil in hand, ready to sketch Will, he spoke. "Did you get me a present for Christmas, Will?"

Will's hands went up, eager in recognition of a topic he was sure of. "Yes, I got you a knife."

“Settle your arms for me, Will. Relax,” Hannibal interjected, joyous with Will’s honesty.

Will put his arms back at his sides and continued his admission. “I was afraid one of us was going to use it.”

A wave overtook Hannibal and he let his mouth open with a pant, surprise tangled up with arousal. He wanted nothing more than for this to continue. He made a sound that Will recognized as a sort of nonverbal cue to go on, and sketched out Will’s shoulders and the curve of his neck.

“It’s for cooking,” Will explained.

“Thank you,” Hannibal offered. “That’s very thoughtful of you.”

“I was trying to flirt,” Will said. “Because you’re dangerous and I know it.”

By god, Will was moving along perfectly. He didn’t even need to direct it; Will was so focused on this one thing that every thought led there. It was invigorating, to say the least.

“And how am I dangerous?” Hannibal prompted, shading in Will’s curls.

“You’re the Chesapeake Ripper,” Will said brightly, lifting his arms again. “If anybody knows how to use a knife to hurt someone, it’s you. So I got you a knife. That’s flirting, cause you won’t hurt me.”

“Won’t I?” Hannibal asked, amusement running through him, bubbling up.

“Well, I guess we’ll find out,” Will said, sounding more curious than resigned. “Maybe you’ll hurt me and I’ll hurt you back. It’ll hurt you to hurt me, ya know? Cause we’re connected somehow, like we’re, like we’re drawing from the same reservoir.”

Hannibal couldn’t have loved him more, and he felt that oily thing roiling in him. It was slippery.

“You enjoy hurting me,” Hannibal offered. “Even before you knew I was the Ripper, you enjoyed hurting me.”

“Guilty pleasure,” Will said mildly.

Hannibal couldn’t help the little bit of a laugh he let out. It must have sounded like a question to Will because he clarified.

“It’s like french fries, or little Debbie cakes. Or, uh, pornography.”

Hannibal wanted suddenly to be having this conversation with Will sober, to have this perspective explained to him of his own will. He grieved for the road not taken, if only briefly. He quickly reminded him that Will had set them on this path. There was no other way.

“Pornography is a guilty pleasure?” he asked, teasing at Will’s sensibilities.

“I think it’s the most guilty,” Will said, straining a bit to grasp the concept.

“What else do you feel guilty about?” Hannibal asked, starting to sketch in the lounge under Will’s lax body, firelight playing over his face and catching on his brow as he dipped his chin.

“Oh, everything. But you mostly,” Will huffed, laughing a bit to himself. “I still love you, even though you kill people. Shouldn’t it stop now, now that I know?”

“Love has its own ideas of right and wrong,” Hannibal said, voice tight with emotion. He dipped his head again, firelight catching on his brow. His face obscured, it looked like a skull was sitting on his well built shoulders. “Would you leave with me tonight?”

“Leave?” Will asked.

“I could pack up what we need while you sleep, make some arrangements, we could be gone by morning,” Hannibal explained, feeling feverish, eager. “I know a vet who could see to your dogs. We could leave by plane, escape anywhere in the world. We could have a new life.”

“I...I don’t,” Will tried, obviously fighting with himself, eyes opening finally. “I don’t think I can yet.”

All of Hannibal’s breath left him at once, crushed by this honesty. They both knew it, but having it said out loud was like a curse, like damnation. Not yet, he knew, meant something other than never, but it felt that way as the daydream burst around him. He set his pencil and pad down in his lap and tried to gather himself.

“I’m sorry,” Will said, his voice weak as he sat up with a swoon.

“That’s alright, sweet boy,” Hannibal cooed, setting his drawing on his desk and coming to take Will’s hands. “I think it’s time for bed, hmm? You sound tired.”

Will nodded and stood to walk to the bedroom with Hannibal, his gaze still unfocused.

Hannibal used a fresh comb on Will’s hair once he was in bed, combing it this way and that to pick up dead skin. Will only hummed and settled further into the pillow. When done, Hannibal put the comb in a plastic bag and kissed Will on his brow before getting together the rest of the evidence and driving to Wolf Trap, to Will’s home.

The dogs were happy to see him and he got out a bag of dried esophagus, the last of the conductor besides the frozen liver he had in the car, and passed it around. After they had all grabbed a piece he let them run out into the snow. It was impossible to see where they went, as the dark seemed thick at the edges of the house, but he knew from practice that they would come back, so he brought the rifle inside and walked to the front closet.

The rifle was Stammets’, recovered from Hannibal’s office after he was knocked out and relieved of his pistol. He’d put the pistol in Will’s trunk on his way out of the house, and now

he tucked the rifle behind the forgotten winter coats. Next was the freeze dried human meat, prepped for the dogs. It went in the other closet, up next to their dry food.

The first of the dogs was at the door so he retrieved the towel Will used to dry their paws and met them at the doorway. They each let him dry off their paws and when they were back inside safely Hannibal walked out to his car to get the cooler out of his trunk. On the way to plant the meat in the freezer Will kept for fish in the boathouse, he scattered the bullet casings from Stammets' rifle in the corpse of trees next to the house.

He found it almost funny that he was putting them back where he found them, walking around in the inky dark that night with a flashlight in hand. Even though they stood out in the snow, they would soon look just like leaf litter to the untrained eye. He gazed out between the trees, a large incandescent bulb shining light into the clearing where Stammets must have confronted Will. He could almost see the scene of surrender, and his lip curled at the thought.

It was too much to think about, so he continued into the detached boathouse, and about his business. He didn't want to have to be out any longer than he had to, not with Will in his bed.

Chapter End Notes

Will: I want to stab you

Hannibal: oh, you are such a wonderful little wretch, it's too bad you're being framed for murder

Hannibal: frames Will harder

note to readers (most of you can skip this, fr fr):

I feel like people are forgetting that there is a whole arc in the show where Hannibal frames Will for their surrogate daughter's murder by shoving her ear down his throat while encouraging a raging illness to get worse and causing seizures in Will with flashing lights. Drugging and lying and framing Will is IN THE SOURCE MATERIAL.

Safe, sane and consensual isn't what this is, and it never was. It's about someone who always breaks their play things finding out what loss really is, and about realizing that they really will do anything to get their love interest back. It's a compelling story because of the betrayal, not in spite of it.

I can't believe I have to say this, but if you get weird in a comment and upset that I'm hurting Will through Hannibal, I just won't publish the comment. IT WILL DISAPPEAR.

The source material doesn't need you to grandstand about how bad it is to abuse a fictional partner. I'm not going to defend what Hannibal is doing because he's a stand-in for the devil, so like, the whole point is he's NOT GOOD. This isn't about real life, and it never was. If that's the hill you die on, I'll grab the shovel and meet you where you fall, but you'll be screaming your last pissed off breath into the void. 🙌🔪🥩🤣💀

Keys

Chapter Summary

Will wakes up with a headache and Jack consults with Beverly.

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes

Will woke, groggy and with a headache, not unlike most mornings. The bed he was in was a surprise and he pulled the covers tighter around himself as he tried to remember the night before. He remembered the feast, remembered eating too much and drinking at least a bottle of wine. Things got a little fuzzy around dessert and he definitely couldn't remember getting into bed.

"You're awake," Hannibal said, standing in the doorway and watching Will with a fond smile. He was already dressed and looking more formal than the day before, in a gray checked suit that featured a blood-red tie and pocket square.

"Is your timing to blame?" Will asked, sitting up and squinting at Hannibal. "Christ, my head is killing me."

Hannibal walked through to the en suite and Will heard the faucet turning on, which explained the glass of water he was presented with when Hannibal returned. Will took the two white pills offered without asking what they were and drank the water down completely. He felt parched and held the glass out as he wiped his mouth, breathing raggedly through his nose.

"Breakfast is waiting," Hannibal said. "Your clothes are just there."

Will looked to the stack of clothes on the chair near the bed and nodded, realizing belatedly that he was in just his boxers. Hannibal took a deep breath, seeming to study Will, and leaned down to kiss his forehead once before leaving the room, closing the door behind him.

Something shifted in Will as he really woke up, and he was left unsettled. How had he managed to let his guard down the night before? It was stupid to get that drunk around Hannibal. He felt his body for wounds, any sign the man had done something to him, hands roaming over his belly and chest, checking the inside of his arms. He didn't know what he thought he'd find, maybe signs of a missing organ or an injection site.

His head was the only thing in pain, after the examination, so he cursed to himself and got out of bed to go to the bathroom. Hannibal had left a toothbrush, still in its packaging, and a miniature tube of toothpaste on the sink and he happily brushed his teeth after taking the longest piss of his life. It would have been nice to have a shower, but Hannibal was

apparently waiting for him downstairs. He found his glasses folded neatly on top of his clothes and he slipped them on before he got dressed.

Downstairs, sitting on his plate amongst a feast of leftovers, was a small red present. Will lifted it into his hand, and looked it over as Hannibal walked in with coffee.

“We forgot this last night, didn’t we?” Will asked, looking around for his bag.

“We may have enjoyed ourselves a bit too much,” Hannibal agreed. “Your bag is by the back door.”

Will nodded and went to get the present for Hannibal out of it. He left his suit jacket and tie on the bag and walked back into the dining room with the present in his hands. He took his seat as Hannibal pulled his chair out and placed the blue box on Hannibal’s empty plate.

“Can I open mine?” he asked, picking up the small package again, holding it in his open palm like it was alive. *Maybe it is,* a little voice in him insisted.

“Of course,” Hannibal allowed, finally sitting down.

Will felt better now that they were on the same level. He peeled back the red paper, revealing a small rectangular box. He paused for a moment, thinking about the past few weeks, about how this was definitely going to be the only present he ever got from Hannibal. He couldn’t imagine what it could be, and wasn’t even sure he would be able to keep it. Maybe every single thing he touched would turn into evidence in the coming months.

“It won’t bite,” Hannibal pressed, smiling at Will and his indecision. He looked much too pleased.

Will smiled back, trying to cover his nervous energy with a small shrug. When the top of the box was open he held the key ring up in front of himself, not sure what to say.

“Those are *your* keys to my home,” Hannibal explained. “So that you know you are always welcome here. You’re family, Will.”

Something sick twisted in Will’s chest and his mouth filled with saliva. He tried to smile, tried to look grateful, but had to take a long sip of his coffee before he spoke. When he did, it felt like a lie.

“Thank you, Hannibal,” he said, even the name feeling false on his tongue. “Thank you.”

Hannibal didn’t react to the discomfort, though it must have been obvious. He just smiled and picked up the present on his own plate. Will was suddenly struck with how utterly stupid it was to give him a knife. He couldn’t *flirt,* couldn’t feel any amount of mirth at that point. He gripped the keys in his hand, holding them tight enough for the pain to center him.

Two thoughts were warring in his mind, and he felt his stomach souring. The first was that maybe he could just stop trying to catch Hannibal. He hadn’t told anyone it was him that he suspected, and he hadn’t gotten any real evidence on him anyway. *Truthfully,* his brain

supplied, *Hannibal wouldn't kill anyone for at least a year. He held to a tight schedule, until you.* Will could put it on the back burner, could spend the year-

That's where the first thought had to be stopped. Jesus, he was being selfish! He hated himself for being so weak. He wasn't on Hannibal's side, he was on the FBI's. Why couldn't he convince himself of that? This wasn't a matter of not knowing the right thing to do. He couldn't just let a killer go because he *liked* him. Loved, loved, loved. His throat tightened.

The second thought was that Hannibal would get away with it anyway, even if he tried to take him down. Hannibal knew he suspected him, knew he was working on something. The only reason he would give Will keys to his fucking house would be to brag. He would get away with murder, even if Will went through every closet and drawer in this house looking for evidence, and he was being supremely smug about it.

Will looked up, watching Hannibal tear at the wrapping paper, and held his breath, mouth a tight line. The top came off the box and the knife shined, the fan-like pattern on the blade catching the light and reflecting it beautifully. All the air rushed from his lungs when Hannibal gripped the blade, a million versions of the next few minutes spilling out in Will's mind, unbidden. Hannibal's forearm rippled with muscle as he held the knife up and admired it, a smile pulling at his lips.

"This is a beautiful piece," he said, finally catching Will's eye. "And I know my way around knives."

He said the last bit like it was an inside joke, but Will didn't follow. All he could do was look at the walls Hannibal was building between them, the light in his eye nothing but a memory, and feel the sudden fear soak him. Hannibal would let him walk away unscathed, he understood, but that morning might be the last time.

"Have you decided what you want from the new year, Will?" Hannibal asked, apropos of nothing. The knife glinted where it was held aloft, winking at him.

Will looked between the blade and Hannibal's eyes, words caught in his throat. All he could think, the one word blaring like a horn in his mind, was *mercy.* Mercy, mercy. Please, god, mercy.

The hour-long drive home felt like it took years. The entire landscape was transformed by snow, making every mile feel like the one before, like he was clogging on towards the end of time but would never reach his destination.

He was numb. The fear had curdled, shifted and become part of him. He was damned, by fate, by character. He just wanted to pull a brake and stop everything, couldn't help but look back and wonder if he could have done something differently. He could have burned the business card, or refused to open his car door that first morning. Each point at which he could have escaped this reality felt like a prayer to an uncaring god.

As he pulled down the private drive onto his property and got closer to his house he felt panic rising. There were two public works pickups idling in front of his house, and he searched his

mind for any clue to why they might be there. Was there a pipe that burst? A tree that was pressing against a line?

He parked his car and got out, walking quickly up to where three men were conversing on his porch. He tried for customer service kindness as he spoke.

“Hi! How can I help you guys?” he asked, hands slipping into his pockets.

The man that seemed to be in charge came over and smiled at him, giving him a tight nod.

“Sorry to bother you,” he said. “Seems to be there’s a car in your lake. We need permission from you to bring our crew in to get it.”

Relief flowed through Will. This he understood, as it had happened before. There was something about having a lake on your property that just begged things to fall in it. It was like the thing had its own gravitational pull.

“Oh, darn,” he said brightly. “Some kids did that with a Kia three years back. I don’t get much traffic, cars or otherwise, but when I do it always seems to be a problem.”

“Same shit, different day for us,” one of the younger men joked, getting a curt look from his boss.

“Where do I sign?” Will asked.

He initialed a few places on the usual forms and the men were off. He was left feeling untethered from the quick change he had to go through to not look like a man reaching his limit. After the trucks were out of sight he went back to his car and got his things out, determined to continue his day.

The dogs were happy to be let out. They’d been stuck on the other side of the door while the three men spoke on the porch for God knows how long before Will got there, and were full of anxious energy. Jack was back at his side, the dog looking up at him with concern, and Will patted him on the head. This was the place that needed him, these creatures were his family, and he needed to remember that. No matter what Hannibal said.

In the basement of Quantico, in the BAU lab, Beverly stood next to Jack as they looked down at the three evidence boxes for the Ripper case.

“Why not bring the guys in? We could get through it faster,” Beverly asked, looking to Jack for his answer.

“Not yet. I don’t want this getting out, so you’re the only one I trust right now,” Jack explained.

“Yeah, that doesn’t sound good,” she teased. “What new evidence have you got? I know you didn’t want to tell me over the phone, but you’ve got to give me some idea what we’re looking for.”

“Fair enough,” Jack allowed. “What I tell you here today doesn’t leave this room.”

“Understood.”

“When was the first time you remember Will Graham asking about the Ripper?” Jack asked.

It wasn’t the answer Beverly was hoping for. In fact it wasn’t an answer at all. She was reminded of the questions she’d been asked by their supervisor when they’d found out about Stammets, and in more pressing news to Will’s solicitation of help.

“He’s been on the Ripper case for years,” she answered honestly. “He’s consulted on at least ten Ripper kills. Why?”

“That’s a long time to work a single case,” Jack said, ostensibly to himself. “You remember when he came back, how he said he’d only consult on the Ripper? He was very insistent.”

“And then he got on a plane to North Carolina,” Beverly reminded him. “That case wasn’t the Ripper.”

“He took that one because Hannibal asked him to,” Jack explained.

“Okay, and?” Beverly asked, her irritation showing. “What did Will do?”

Jack finally gave in and explained to Beverly what Hannibal had told him. He recounted Hannibal’s panic as he found the conductor he’d dismissed in front of Will dead a week later, how he was shocked to see a painting from his own home re-enacted by the Ripper. He tried to make the point that Will was sick, and that he was vulnerable, possibly, then he told her about Will showing up to Hannibal’s office the day Stammets disappeared.

“What’s that look?” he asked, pausing in his recitation to look Beverly over.

“Will said he was drugged by Stammets,” she said.

“We took him on his word,” Jack reminded her. “No way the stuff would’ve still been in his bloodstream by that point.”

“Jack,” she said softly. “If he was involved with the Ripper before that, I’m not sure, but after...he said he lost his phone that day. Started texting from a new number the next morning. He told me he couldn’t remember where he lost it.”

“And Hannibal said he used it to text him, to coax him to his office,” Jack replied. “So that means he had it after he woke up. Why would he get rid of it?”

“What’s he covering up?” Beverly supplied weakly.

“Can I tell you what I think?” Jack asked, more of a formality than anything as he didn’t wait for an answer. “I think Will was woken up by his protector. I think he knows who the Ripper is because he met him. I think he met him that afternoon.”

Beverly felt like she was going to be sick. She remembered Will's growing agitation and insistence that he alone could catch the Ripper. She had to tell Jack about the opera, there was no way around it. Just then her computer pinged and a new page opened.

"What is it?" Jack asked.

"Stammets' car is back in the system," she said, voice flat, shocked. "It's been recovered in Wolf Trap Virginia, Jack. Just got pulled out of a lake."

Chapter End Notes

uh oh

Dawn

Chapter Summary

Things start really moving and Beverly stops by to tell Will he's in trouble.

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes

Beverly showed up at Will's house the next morning at dawn, her little Jeep alerting the dogs as she pulled up the drive. Will was just making breakfast for himself, coffee and toast, and brought his coffee out to the porch to see what all the racket was about.

"Morning," Beverly said, hopping from her Jeep with a frown.

"Morning," Will replied. "Let me get you a cup of coffee."

Beverly nodded and greeted the dogs as Will let them out. Seeing Will again, even though it had only been a week, had all of her protective instincts firing. He was an innocent, and she knew it with a certainty that made her want to scream. She was relieved she hadn't told Jack about the opera, and desperate to explain to him that he was in some deep, deep shit.

Will returned after a few minutes and placed a hot mug in her hands, kneeling to clean the dog's paws as they came back in.

"Thanks," she said, pushing past him and into the house.

"To what do I owe the honor?" Will asked, closing up the house and ushering her to a seat by the space heater. "We weren't supposed to meet till Wednesday."

She'd gone over what to say on the drive here, imagined several different scenarios. None of them prepared her for the bone deep ache of having to tell Will the truth.

"You're in danger," she said, her voice rough.

Will raised his eyebrows. "Well, yeah. But they took the security team back last week, so it can't be that dire."

There was nothing for it, she had to be specific, and be quick about it.

"You are currently under investigation by the FBI. A team led by Jack Crawford are looking to prove that you colluded with the Ripper. They're working on putting together a timeline of the Ripper's crimes, and your whereabouts," she explained. "They're getting a warrant."

“What the fuck?” Will gasped.

She felt tears start to fall as she continued. “I can’t do anything to help you on Wednesday. Because then I’d have to tell Jack. Do you understand?”

“I really fucking don’t,” Will said, standing up in agitation to pace back and forth.

“Will, *I* don’t think you’re a killer,” she replied. “But *Hannibal* seems to.”

It was like he’d been paused. He stopped where he was walking and his arms hung at his sides at weird angles. Even his face was frozen, eyes glassy. Beverly took a Kleenex out of her pocket and tried to get herself back under control as she gave him a moment to process.

“You shouldn’t go to the opera,” she pressed. “You should stay away from the Ripper as much as you can.”

Will nodded and took his seat again, his hands shaking. He looked resolutely at the floor, but Beverly could tell he was trying to work out a question. She gave him the time.

“And what does Jack think?” he asked, working his jaw.

“Jack thinks you’re sick, and that whatever’s going on made you more susceptible to the Ripper,” Beverly said, trying to sound as sympathetic as she was. “He thinks you’ve been working with him, or doing *something* with him.”

Will rolled his eyes and leaned back in his chair, a strange look on his face.

“Jack trusts Hannibal, but you don’t,” he said after a moment.

She shook her head. That wasn’t quite right. “It’s more that I *know* you. Hannibal is apparently very worried for you, and it’s not that I don’t trust him, I just trust my option of you more than his. Whatever he sees, I see the absence, okay? You’re not a sidekick to a psychopathic murderer, you’re just some guy.”

Will snorted out a laugh and wrapped his arms around himself, rocking in his chair.

“What aren’t you telling me, Will?” Beverly begged, setting down her coffee cup to reach across and grip the arm of Will’s seat.

Will’s mouth twisted up and he shook his head, breathing hitching again and again. For a moment she thought he would keep his mouth shut, as he’d done before.

“I know who he is,” Will finally whispered. The look of pain that accompanied the admission was enough to break Beverly’s heart.

“God, Will. What the fuck are you playing at?” she asked, tears falling freely again. “Who is it?”

“I can’t put you in danger. We both know he could disappear either of us,” he said, throwing his hand up, frantic.

Beverly shook her fists in front of her, anger at what was happening taking hold of her. “Just tell me,” she demanded.

“And what?” Will demanded back. “I’m already going down, I’m already stuck with him and all that entails. I’m not doing that to you.”

“Then tell Jack,” she pressed. “Tell somebody.”

“Jack won’t believe me. It’s unbelievable,” Will said, shaking his head. “I’m the bad guy, I’m gonna remain the bad guy in Jack’s eyes until he hears it from the Ripper’s mouth.”

Beverly tried to think of who Jack trusted, which man Will was talking about. There were a few teachers that came to mind, and one guy she used to work with. None of them had the psychopathy required, none of them fit the profile.

“He was a Doctor,” she said, scanning her mind.

“Stop. Stop Beverly, please. Don’t go after him,” Will said, desperation clear on his face. “Do what Jack tells you, keep your head down. Don’t go looking for him.”

Without another word, Will stood and went to hold the front door open, a short whistle telling the dogs to stay in their beds. Beverly couldn’t believe it.

“Will,” she tried. “Just tell me you won’t go to the opera. It’ll only be used against you.”

Will ducked his head and pointed out the door, and all she could do was collect her things. When she was through the doorway and back out in the freezing cold she stuck her foot out to stop the door from closing.

“Jack is keeping this quiet,” she said, praying Will was listening from behind the blank stare. “You have a week, at most. If I were you, I’d get my things in order.”

“Would you take my dogs if I had to go away for a while?” Will asked through the phone.

“Sorry, what?” Alana asked.

She hadn’t heard from Will since they went out to dinner at the waffle place, and had honestly been shocked to see his name pop up as an incoming caller.

“My dogs,” Will reiterated. “I know it’s a lot to ask, but I don’t know who else to turn to.”

“Where are you going?” she asked, no less confused. “How long will you-“

“I can’t say,” Will replied. “Just, please. Please, if something goes wrong-“

“What’s going wrong?” She asked “Will, you aren’t making sense.”

There was a brief silence on the other side and the scuffling sound of the phone changing hands.

“If I had a family member that I had to go care for,” Will said, framing the question strangely, “would you look after my dogs.”

“Oh, Will,” she gasped, “Yeah, of course.”

She felt a little better. Will was always so private that she supposed he would have trouble asking for help. She didn’t even remember him mentioning any family members, but she knew he came from Louisiana, so it made sense he would have to travel to see them.

“Let me know when you’re leaving,” she assured him. “They’ll go wild on the property, they’ll have a ball.”

“Thank you,” Will replied bleakly. “I just...I want to keep this quiet because it might not be a thing. So just don’t say anything, yeah?”

She felt pride swelling up and nodded, though he couldn’t see it. It had been a hard few months, but it felt good to be trusted by Will again. Apparently she’d done something right.

“My lips are sealed,” she said. “Anything you need for now?”

“Actually,” Will replied, “doesn’t your nephew work for the public radio station?”

“Thom?” she asked. “He’s still there, yeah. You want me to text you his number?”

“That would be great, yeah,” Will agreed. “Gotta go now.”

“Alright,” she said. “I’ve got you, Will. Whatever you need.”

When he said goodbye and hung up she searched her contacts and sent over her nephew’s phone number. Maybe Will was looking for someone to watch his house while he was gone.

The sun had set about an hour before Will drove across town, and the giant lit sign for Guitar Center led him like a beacon off the freeway. He felt numb, and had to keep reminding himself this was really happening, he was really being framed.

He’d texted with Thom and they’d agreed to meet up in the alley behind the guitar place, where he worked a few times a week. The parking lot was massive, but empty, and Will found his way easily to the wide alley that the delivery trucks used. He pulled right up to the cement structure that housed the garbage cans and turned his car off.

Before he could take his phone out to text, the back door opened and a tall twenty-something kid with long hair and a beanie walked out. Will grabbed the bag from his glove box and went to meet him.

“Yo, Mr. Graham,” Thom said, making Will feel a million years old. “Let’s go sit in my car.”

Will followed him to a beat up Toyota Camry and got in on the passenger side. It was only slightly less cold than the alley, but at least they wouldn’t be heard.

“Good to see you again, Thom,” Will said, opening the paper bag in his hand and pulling out a small plastic tube.

“Yes, sir,” Thom replied. “Light one up.”

Will cracked open the plastic tube and tilted it so the joint slid out. He didn’t smoke weed often, but if there was a better way to put a college student at ease, he didn’t know of it.

“Do your students know you smoke?” Thom asked as Will lit up and took the first drag.

“My students,” Will said, holding his breath and then letting out the smoke, “don’t know anything about me.”

“Professor Mysterious,” Thom teased, taking the joint and pulling on it hard.

The cherry lit up bright red and Will had a flash of Hannibal kneeling in the woods, his eyes glowing.

“So what can I do for you?” Thom asked. “You need guitar lessons, Prof?”

“I need to record something,” Will replied.

“Kinky,” Thom answered, passing the joint back.

“Don’t I fucking wish,” Will snorted. “No, just audio. Five hours tops.”

Thom seemed to think it over, and held his hand up. “Yeah, yeah. Okay, first choice is the Zoom F2 field recorder. I’ve got a used one. You’ll get great sound out of that, but you have to position the microphone ahead of time. The whole thing weighs like, two ounces.”

Will passed the joint back after a deep pull, shaking his head. “Nothing visible. No clip microphone. Audio quality doesn’t have to be *that* great. I’m really just looking to record some conversations.”

Thom rolled his window down to ash out of it and kept the joint after Will declined.

“Okay, how about this?” Thom asked. “My friend has a recorder that looks just like a cigarette lighter. Stick it in the breast pocket of whatever shirt you’ve got on, right, and no one will give you shit. Even if they find it.”

“That’s more like it,” Will said, feeling the warmth and dawning positive outlook that he always got from Sativa. “They won’t mind me borrowing it?”

“Naw. I can get it for you tomorrow. Just don’t lose it, it cost like a hundred-fifty bucks.” Thom laughed, slapping him on the shoulder.

Will pulled out his wallet and slipped four crisp fifties out, folding them and holding them out to Thom. “Just in case.”

Thom took the money and slipped it into his pocket, but looked at Will sideways. “You in trouble, Mr. Graham?”

Will stuck his wallet back in his pocket and opened the door, not speaking until he was out and leaning on the it.

“Nothing for you to worry about. Meet you here tomorrow? Same time?” Will asked.

“Sure,” Thom agreed, still puffing on the joint.

“And don’t tell your aunt okay?”

Thom just laughed at him and waved him away, so Will went back to his car and started home. He felt determined again, sure that he would be able to catch Hannibal out. It didn’t even matter if it was through regular channels anymore, he just had to get *something* to convince Jack.

Chapter End Notes

Who had weed smoking Will Graham on their bongo card?

Dance

Chapter Summary

Jack does his best to warn Will, and Will and Hannibal head to the opera!

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes

The whole morning of New Year's Eve was spent cleaning. There shouldn't have been much more to do, but Will had failed to throw away the boxes from the few Christmas gifts he bought himself, and the dog's dishes were gross, and after that he did laundry. Anything to keep his body busy so that his mind didn't think of the upcoming night.

He was fiddling around with the recorder Thom got him when his phone went off a few hours before he had to leave. His stomach sank when he saw Jacks number.

"Fuck," Will hissed. Then when the call connected, "Hello?"

"Do you have something you want to tell me, Will?" Jack asked, sounding irritated.

"Not right now," Will said honestly. "Might have something for you tomorrow."

"This isn't about what you can do tomorrow, it's about what we know today. Stammets' car was found on your property, Will. Now I gotta ask you, why hide this?" Jack asked. "Who are you covering for?"

"Jack," Will tried.

"If you asked me a week ago whether I thought you could be colluding with the Ripper, I would have said no, but now? Now I don't know what to think," Jack interrupted. "Are you a killer, Will? Did I let a killer onto my team?"

"No, Jack," Will pleaded, pushing away from the table to stand.

"If we expanded the scope of our search on your property," Jack demanded, "would we find anything?"

"No," Will blurted. "Of course not."

"Have you been in contact with the Ripper, Will?" Jack asked.

"N-no." Will panicked, shaking his head. There were alarm bells going off in his mind and he felt nausea coming on. Oh, god, he should just tell the truth, he thought. Just come clean now.

“Why don’t I believe you?”

The question hung in the air. Will didn’t know what to say, he could feel himself panicking, feel the sweat beading on his brow. He struggled to pull himself together as everything else seemed to be falling apart.

“You know me, Jack,” he said, his voice tight.

“I hope I do,” Jack replied, sighing heavily into the phone. “Your nose better be clean. That’s all I can say.”

Will mumbled something in response and the line clicked off, leaving him to sit thinking about all the new and interesting ways Hannibal was finding to fuck him. He thought briefly of shooting Hannibal in his tux, showing up to his house for the opera and just ending him. No, that would be too easy. On the contrary, the thought of Hannibal behind bars was becoming more appealing.

The lighter was black, and absurdly fit his outfit down to the black chrome of the metal hood. It looked like the real deal, but didn’t carry the scent of butane. Will worried about that for a moment but figured Hannibal would never see it, so it wouldn’t matter.

Hannibal had insisted they ride to the opera house together in the Bently. Will was sure he would have hated being shown off even before he knew Hannibal had turned on him, but now he was incensed. He wasn’t going to play coy anymore, he was going to let Hannibal know he could see him. Honesty might provoke honesty.

He arrived at Hannibal’s house a few minutes early and sat in his car for a moment to brace himself. The recorder was running in his pocket and he had a pistol he’d bought through a neighbor in an ankle holster. It was a relief that the tux had wide enough legs to hide it. He took one more look down and got out of the car, carrying a bottle of wine in one hand.

The door opened before he got all the way down the walkway and Hannibal stood in the doorway watching Will. Surprisingly, Hannibal let him see everything. He could see the hesitation, could tell Hannibal was also wondering if this would turn into a duel. Will’s pace faltered, so he brought up the wine to cover for it.

“Chardonnay,” he said, presenting the bottle to Hannibal, label side front. “For after the show?”

Hannibal took it from him, his movements so smooth they didn’t even wrinkle his elegant suit, and went back inside to put it down. The empty doorway gaped ominously, and Will stayed where he was. He remembered exchanging gifts, and how it had felt like the last time he’d be allowed safe passage through Hannibal’s world. It didn’t bode well for the night.

“Thank you, Will,” Hannibal said, once he was back in the doorway. “Now, we have a date, don’t we?”

Will was about to speak when Hannibal held out a corsage box. Nestled in white crepe paper and surrounded by babies' breath was a single blood-red rose.

“Now I feel like you’re taking me to prom,” Will blustered, laughing nervously as Hannibal opened the box and stepped close to him with the sharp pin glinting.

“Hold still,” Hannibal said, running his hand across Will’s chest and gripping his lapel. “I wouldn’t want to hurt you.”

“Wouldn’t you?” Will asked, voice soft at their proximity, already feeling the intoxicating pull of conversation with Hannibal.

There was a moment where Hannibal paused, hands in midair, and Will thought he was done for, but Hannibal snapped out of it with a bland smile.

“I only want what’s best for you, Will,” he replied, affixing the rose and setting Will’s jacket straight. “You’re always my first concern,” he paused to once again look directly into Will’s eyes, “after myself.”

Will understood him in that moment more than he thought he ever had, and he felt himself recoil a bit even as arousal shot through him. Will had threatened Hannibal, was currently threatening him with his knowledge, and now he was seeing the animal that kept Hannibal alive in times of desperation. The beast turning in Hannibal’s breast at the threat Will posed was hungry, and would remain so, in hopes that Hannibal would be well fed.

He’s going to eat you whole. It wasn’t a thought, as much as a feeling. Will was on the edge of being devoured, and he kept trying to grip that one sharp tooth. *Foolish.*

“Come along.”

It was enough of a command for Will to jolt out of his thoughts and follow Hannibal to his car, sliding into the passenger side seat like he had a few dozen other times. He imagined Hannibal driving them into a lake and watching him drown, gripping Will by the collar so he couldn’t escape the watery grave. He felt the compression of the water on his lungs and breathed deeply to try to usher the thought away.

He was reminded of what he had understood of the Ripper that day at the botanical gardens. He was done with dying, and wanted to live. Will felt a small amount of relief in that, because it meant Hannibal likely wouldn’t get them into a deadly car accident on the way to their date.

“Are you excited for the show tonight?” Hannibal asked as they pulled off the main road towards the freeway.

“I actually read the synopsis,” Will replied, counting the look of surprise on Hannibal’s face as a win. “Funny how the devil can’t help but want to play the fiddle. We had a lot of those stories around where I grew up; men tricked by the devil on a lonely road. It’s an interesting choice and it had me wondering if this is just another chance for you to joke about being Old Nick?”

Hannibal gave him a wry grin, and he was sure he was onto something.

“I never joke,” Hannibal replied, the humor in his voice a vicious tease. “They say the devil loves the fiddle because it causes people to dance. Such emotion taking over a lowly human can be dangerous for the soul. But, If I remember correctly, I said I might be the serpent, not the devil. The serpent only wants to bring knowledge.”

“Serpent, Zeus, some lesser devil,” Will replied. “I think you enjoy gumming up the works more than anything.”

“You’re in quite the mood tonight,” Hannibal noted, smiling almost fondly.

“I’m just seeing you for the first time,” Will replied, as brazen as he could manage.

Hannibal looked from traffic to Will, taking in his frame as Will stared with determination out the window. He could feel Hannibal’s eyes, and tried to swallow down any resulting fear.

“In the play the devil loses,” he pointed out. “Over and over. That’s also part of our folklore.”

“He wins in the end,” Hannibal replied.

“Only because Joseph crosses the barrier, desperate to live the life he once had,” Will agreed.

There was a long pause between them, classical music playing gently through the car as it sped along the freeway. When Hannibal spoke again his voice was soft in a way that suggested hesitation.

“Is that what you would choose? The life you once had?”

Will took a second to think of the life he had before Hannibal, before the Ripper. Was there a part of him that would have always wanted to be involved in something this high stakes? He wondered if that had been something Hannibal had seen in him. Had he been so desperate to be a part of Hannibal’s grisly world that he gave any hope of stability away, any hope of safety?

“There’s no going back,” Will said, resolute. “When Joseph buys his fiddle back from the devil, it won’t play a single note. Once touched, that world is changed, so there’s no going back.”

“No,” Hannibal allowed, “I suppose there really isn’t.”

Onward, then, Will thought, *into the terrible unknown.*

They drove for a long time in silence then, but it was comfortable silence. Something in Will ached at the comfort, hungry for any last taste. He let it ache, and watched as the lights of downtown came into view. Within minutes they were racing through the streets of downtown and the whole city felt alive, people hopping from cars to brightly decorated restaurants. He was reminded it was a holiday.

“Do you recall what our Joseph kept in his bag?” Hannibal asked, just as they were pulling up to a long line of cars waiting for the valet.

“His fiddle, of course,” Will said, thinking back, “a picture of his girl, and a St Sebastian medallion.”

“It makes sense for a soldier to carry the medallion of St Sebastian, as he is the patron saint of all those that desire a saintly death,” Hannibal said, hand reaching out to rest on Will’s thigh.

Will worked hard not to pull away. That touch that had soothed him so many times now registered as a threat, and he didn’t want to cower in its wake. He relaxed, hand curled on the door handle, and tried to stay present.

“He had to be killed twice,” he replied. “Not sure I want to know what else a saintly death could look like.”

Hannibal chuckled and put both hands back on the steering wheel. Slowly, they got closer to the front door of the large gray brick edifice. When Will had heard of the Lyric he imagined a building with massive arches or pillars, and he had to admit he was a little let down by the flat face and rectangular windows.

“Sebastian never lost his faith,” Hannibal said, pulling Will from his thoughts. “It was seen as admirable, how devout he was. He converted many, even from behind bars.”

“Yeah, well,” Will allowed, opening his door as they came to a stop. “They still killed him.”

He exited the car and walked quickly to the front door, leaving Hannibal to speak with the valet and walk up to the doors himself. It was a small slight, but Will was determined it would not be the last of the night.

Chapter End Notes

> Aaaaaaanybody notice Hannibal was checking to see if Will was wired? Yikes, that was fucking close.

Monster

Chapter Summary

Will finally understands the last piece of the puzzle that is the Chesapeake Ripper.

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes

Will waited until they were seated in the private booth overlooking the stage to speak to Hannibal again. Hannibal had stopped to get them both a glass of wine, and when he sat down and handed over the glass Will took it and leaned in to speak.

“You want to tell me why you’re talking to Jack about me?” he asked, taking a sip of wine and catching Hannibal’s eye.

Hannibal smiled, eyes drifting over Will’s tense frame as he worked on an answer. He came to it surprisingly quickly.

“So this is anger,” he noted with a little too much humor. “Anger makes you rude.”

Will’s stomach turned and he wanted to hit Hannibal, fire rising up in him. “You have him suspecting me of things I didn’t do,” he spat.

“I only told him the truth,” Hannibal countered, “that you aren’t well.”

Will was incensed. His mind spun, wondering what else Hannibal told Jack, and he struggled to find the words to defend himself.

“Jack is asking if I’m a killer,” he said, glaring at Hannibal.

“In a technical sense, we’re both killers,” Hannibal replied. “The FBI has provided us both with a look behind the curtain into the unreality of taking a life.”

“This isn’t about when *you* dragged me to North Carolina,” Will spat. “You know what this is about.”

“If I recall, you once told me you felt like you were becoming the Ripper. You felt his patience and brutality,” Hannibal replied. “What did you say about his sincerity, Will?”

Everything around Will felt foggy as the possibility that all the private conversations he’d had with Hannibal were now being shared. He felt a sudden revulsion swell up in him, and he had to close his eyes tight to keep from cursing. He let out a high whine and shook his head.

“Did you tell that to Jack?” he ground out, eyes still closed.

“No,” Hannibal answered simply.

Will felt a wave crest in him and the plastic wine glass cracked. He held the drink out as wine started to trickle over his fist, blinking at it, then cursed under his breath and drank down the end of it. He set the fractured cup next to his chair on the low carpeting. Hannibal handed him something to dry his hand on and he tried to find his footing. He realized that that recording so far couldn’t be given over, unless he wanted to look even more guilty.

“You knew who I was before we met. You knew.” he said, giving Hannibal a hurt look. “You knew I would go after the Ripper.”

“I didn’t know how involved you would become,” Hannibal replied. “But yes, I knew.”

“Is this what it is to be loved by a god? Met with such ardor, then left to the wolves?” Will hissed.

“You put the wolves on the scent,” Hannibal replied. “You did this.”

Will couldn’t reply, as the curtain pulled back and the new conductor came out to a great burst of applause. He wanted to tell Hannibal that he hadn’t given him away yet, even as the recorder worked in his pocket, even as he tried to capture him. It felt like a bizarre high road to be on when the killer sitting next to him was so intent on his own persecution. He should have figured that Hannibal would make himself into a martyr at the slightest provocation.

The conductor introduced the musicians and they started up with the Soldier’s March, the first of the three actors coming onto the stage.

Will was definitely recording their discussion, Hannibal knew, but he doubted it was authorized in any real sense. He scanned the crowd, looking for the other agent. He couldn’t imagine a scenario where the FBI didn’t place someone in the crowd. Agents, just like all law enforcement, had a look about them. Even in plain clothes, they stood out in a room. In a tux, they were even easier to spot.

Down and to the left, third seat back. Yes.

Foster. Agent Foster was in his fifties, had a wife and two daughters in college. They had met a few months ago in the weight room in Quantico. His personal gym was a much more relaxing environment, but he had been attempting to ingratiate himself to the group of agents he would clearly have to work with. It was surprisingly easy to get them to talk. Agent Foster had told him all about his life, and that much time in front of a mirror meant Hannibal would recognize him anywhere. He would have to remember to say hello.

Will was tapping his foot on the floor, bristling with anger. They were only two scenes in, the narrator telling the crowd that Joseph was about to be frightened by the devil near the river. It would be another thirty minutes before Will could speak. That meant that there would be time

for him to settle down a bit and time for Hannibal to figure out how to approach the topic of conversation.

He understood Will's anger. His own anger was tempered now with the fact that he had put things into motion. Now, in that anger's place a new kind of sensation was growing. He'd expected to feel that same superiority as he always did when he got something over on a particularly smart adversary. Instead, he felt a hollow ache deep in his gut. He let his eyes drift to Will again, trying to memorize him just before the drop.

Save him.

The thought came into his mind out of nowhere and he focused back on the stage. The devil was drawing Joseph back to his home and Hannibal was wrought with memories of his and Will's first night together, the firelight on Will's trusting face. He drew in a slow breath through his nose, steadying himself.

He forced himself to fully engage with the show, shifting his inner landscape to the first time he'd seen the show in Budapest. He'd been in his twenties, in Hungary on break from school, and had spent the afternoon at the Franz Liszt Academy of Music. The memory unspooled as he let the music take him back. The wind instruments took control as the characters walked to the March du Soldat and he felt himself disappear into the music.

As intermission was called and the crowd started to move, Will found himself following Hannibal out to the lobby and through to the atrium where a large group was surrounding the champagne bar. Hannibal took Will's arm in his as a few people rounded at their presence, eyes lighting up in recognition and then surprise as they took their pair in. It felt like having a bright light directed onto him and Will did his best not to flinch.

"Bedelia," Hannibal said, nodding to a petite blond woman to their left. "You look ravishing tonight."

"And this must be the greatly anticipated Will Graham," the woman replied, holding her hand out. "I've heard so much about you."

"Any of it good?" Will asked, taking her hand and giving it a prim kiss.

"Do you have to ask?" she replied, seeming to study him.

Will was saved from having to answer by an even slimmer brunette. She didn't seem interested in him, instead vying for Hannibal's attention.

"Hannibal, you've been so rude," she chided.

Hannibal let out a small laugh. "Is that true?"

The woman shivered under his attention and nodded. "You haven't sent out invitations to your annual dinner party. Or maybe you just didn't invite me."

“Ah, you’ve caught me out,” Hannibal allowed, hand over his chest for emphasis. “I’m afraid I must skip this year. There was more on my plate than I was expecting with work.”

“You still have time,” the woman insisted.

Hannibal smiled and shook his head, looking so smug that Will almost missed what the woman had said. *Annual dinner party.* Something was fitting itself together in Will’s subconscious.

“You can’t force a feast,” Hannibal demurred. “I’m afraid you’ll simply have to wait until next year.”

Another person from the crowd started talking to Hannibal, but Will was focused on a calendar in his mind, counting backwards to the first Ripper murder. Once a year, three victims were relieved of some of their internal organs. Once a year Hannibal Lecter gave a dinner party for the elite of Baltimore. Will remembered the fancy yearly dinner making it into Freddie’s first spread on Hannibal.

When it fell into place Will pulled his arm from Hannibal and turned on his heel. He had to make it to the bathroom or he was going to have to throw up in one of the expensive potted plants, and he didn’t want to draw a scene. He breathed raggedly through his nose as he wove his way around patrons and down the hall, jogging as the bathroom came into view and bursting through the door.

Someone was telling him that the bathroom was for staff only but Will was already vomiting into the toilet, and when he continued they left him to finish on his own. He retched, eventually only pulling up bile, his throat burning. He flushed the toilet and stumbled to his feet, sticking his head under the spray of the sink the moment he got to it and rinsing his mouth out. He was splashing water on the back of his neck when the door opened again.

“I know, I’ll be done in a minute,” he said, not looking up.

The door closed and locked and Will realized he wasn’t alone. He blinked up as Hannibal took the last few steps into the room, hands in his pockets and face frighteningly blank.

“Fuck,” Will hissed, drying his hands on a paper towel as his heart raced out of his chest.

“Such language,” Hannibal said. “And such behavior.”

Will looked at him and considered how he had missed it. He wondered briefly if Hannibal had a whole second staging area where he processed the meat, some icebox of a room with all metal surfaces. Somewhere he could disassemble a body, hollow it out and give it back that way. He wondered exactly how much human flesh he’d eaten over the last few months.

“Annual dinner parties,” Will said. “I mean, how could you be more overt?”

Hannibal shifted his footing so that his left foot was in front of the door and Will realized he was cornered. He felt a wave of fear wash over him and the hairs on the back of his neck stood up.

“You’re afraid,” Hannibal said, cutting into him like a knife.

“No shit,” Will replied, petulantly.

“Fear is a common reaction to the divine,” Hannibal teased, his eyes dark.

“You’re not divine,” Will said, skin crawling. “You’re just a monster.”

Hannibal’s mouth twisted and he took two steps back to stand directly in front of the door. The message was clear: you aren’t leaving.

“Let me go,” Will said, forcing his legs to walk him closer to Hannibal even as his mind was screaming for him to find a vent to climb into.

“Or you’ll shoot me with the gun at your ankle?” Hannibal asked, head tilting to the left. “And you consider me monstrous?”

Will felt his blood run cold. There was no way he could get to the gun before Hannibal grabbed him, and there was no way he’d win a fist fight with the man. He thought desperately of what he could do to get away.

“I do,” he said, stepping closer and refusing to break eye contact.

“Are you breaking up with me, Will?” Hannibal asked, voice full of false innocence.

Will let out a panicked, high laugh and did the only thing he could think of. He unzipped his pants and reached his hand into his boxers, pulled himself out and aimed. The look on Hannibal’s face when the first stream of piss made contact with his pant leg was a victory, and the way he scrambled out of the doorway allowed Will to slide in. One hand unlocking the door, the other tucking himself back into his pants, he gave Hannibal one last look.

Monster.

Chapter End Notes

> Hannibal dancing alone on the edge of the dance floor to The Only Heartbreaker by Mitski : I'm in control. I'm the prettiest boy at the ball. I'm not going to cry over Will Graham.

Ambush

Chapter Summary

Will gets home as quickly as he can, but home might not stay safe for long.

Will caught the first cab he could once he was out of the Lyric and into the night, the twinkling lights blurring in his vision as he fought to focus his eyes. He gave the cabbie Hannibal's address and they were off. Will watched the front doors of the opera house as they drove away, but no one came bursting out of them to try to chase him down, and the building grew small in his vision without any fanfare. His heart still beat like he had just robbed a bank.

It barely took them any time to get to Hannibal's, everyone already at their destinations for the night. Will soon found himself paying the cabbie and sliding into his own car. He looked out the passenger window at the back door, windowed panels lit from the inside and tried to understand what he was seeing. The intricate domesticity of the home hid a monster that would not only strike out at strangers, but even those closest to him. That was the last straw, Will thought. He was sure it said something about him that he only really felt like siding against Hannibal when he knew he had no other choice.

Worried that Hannibal might still be following him, he turned the car on, the scent of melting plastic coming from the heating vents, and started the drive home. It took about ten minutes of silence for the adrenalin of his escape to wear off and for a deep and aching sadness to take over. He was on the freeway when he felt tears on his cheeks and knew he was crying, his face prickling hot from the dual embarrassment of not getting enough evidence and being bested when he was in the right.

God, oh, *god,* he was fucked. There was nothing on the recording that would convince anyone of anything other than the fact that he was losing it. He needed help, and he had no idea who he could turn to anymore. He felt hot, overwhelmed and oddly confined by the cab of the car, and distantly he thought he heard the whistle of a train. Somehow, he still made it home in one piece.

His house was exactly as he left it, and he let himself be run upon by the dogs as he collapsed to his knees in the doorway. He was weeping and shaking and Winston was licking the hot tears from his cheeks as Buster jumped in place and whined. There was enough warmth among their frantic bodies that he wasn't affected by the growing winds.

He tried to be calmed by his pack, tried to connect with them completely to block out the gnawing terror, but he kept getting pulled back to the bathroom, to that feeling of being trapped by something much larger than himself. Hannibal had never used his size against Will, and standing in the way of an exit was pretty low on the list of ways someone could

overpower you, but Will still felt the waves of fear like a prey animal only *just* out of danger. *A switch in his mind that had been trying to flip the whole time he'd known Hannibal now met with no resistance.*

He stumbled to his feet after getting his breathing under control and made his way inside and into the downstairs bathroom. He brushed his teeth as the dogs continued to weave around his legs and refused to look himself in the eye, afraid of what he might see. His face was hot and puffy and he felt like he'd been crying all night. A headache was starting in his sinuses so he took a few aspirin, looking at the half empty bottle of antibiotics in the medicine cabinet. Every turn was a reminder that he was losing control.

Half a bottle of whiskey later, Will fell into an uneasy sleep, Winston, Jack, and Buster joining him on the bed to fight off the cold and the dread. He felt himself sinking, and was pulled under by the tides of sleep.

When he woke in the dream there was a familiar voice in his ear and a hand on his shoulder. He blinked his eyes open to find himself sitting at the head of the table in Hannibal's dining room. The lights felt too dim, and his eyes struggled to take everything in. The long table was covered in food and, just as had happened with the photos from the Mushroom Man murders, the more Will looked the more body parts he saw. In place of more familiar cuts of meat, held in beds of fresh kale, human hands and feet were defrosting. Will saw what was clearly a human thigh nestled between carrots and potatoes and closed his eyes.

"Don't go away," Hannibal said, revealing himself as the presence at Will's side. "Open your eyes and see. Didn't you want to see?"

Will opened his eyes and blinked back tears as Hannibal leaned over him to cut a slice from a bloody torso, ribs peaking out of wet flesh. Will tried to turn away, panicking when he felt the restraints holding him to his seat. Hannibal gripped his chin and held a fork up to his lips. Will fought it, but once the meat was on his tongue it tasted perfectly seasoned and was, impossibly, cooked. The sensation was alarming as he took a second forkful from Hannibal, expecting blood and tasting gravy.

"See?" Hannibal purred. "You like it. You can't deny that to yourself anymore. You came to me hungry, and I fed you. Your participation is your guilt."

"I didn't know," Will pleaded, his vision going fuzzy again.

Time seemed to skip and Will was abruptly surrounded by guests. All the seats at the table were filled, the crowd from the champagne bar transported and talking loudly to one another. They were eating raw organs with gusto and Will felt his stomach clench at the amount of blood being produced with each slice of knife and fork.

"Did I not nourish you? Did I not keep you from death? Did I not bleed for you?" Hannibal asked, back at his shoulder and breathing against his neck.

Bedelia, the blond woman Hannibal had introduced him to, echoed him at Will's left side, holding a wine glass aloft as if to toast. "Did he not bleed for you?"

A loud knocking came like punctuation to her question and Will jumped. No one else seemed to hear it.

The crowd was really talking then, but the hum of their conversation couldn't cover up the pulsating buzz of Will's good old friend the fly-man. Where Hannibal had been, a writhing mass of horse flies in the shape of a man stood. Will shook his head as the next offering was held to his lips, and his chin was kept still somehow. He was resisting, cursing and shaking and the knocking came again.

He woke to the cacophony of his dogs barking at the door and someone knocking. It must have been morning because the sun was just coming up, the world still a cold bluish white. Will pulled the sheets back and stumbled to the door, his head aching with every movement. He looked down at himself and frowned at his naked legs, thinking about how cold it would be on the other side of the door. He wanted to find a robe to cover up his boxers and undershirt but the knocking came again.

"Fine, yes!" he shouted, pushing through the dogs and opening the front door wide. "What's the-"

Will lost his words at the sight before him. Jack Crawford stood at his door with a folded piece of paper in his hands, looking for all the world like the grim reaper. Behind him, just at the edge of the yard, stood Jimmy, Beverly and Brian Zeller. Beverly averted her gaze, arms crossed, but Zeller looked right back at Will, unflinching. Next to them were a couple of animal control officers leaning against a white county shelter truck, another parked behind it.

The pulses of blue light from the idling cop car made the whole scene feel like a joke. They weren't at a crime scene, they were at his house, and for the life of him Will couldn't understand why they were all there. He felt like he was still in the dream.

"Will Graham," Jack announced, "I have a warrant for your arrest on suspicion of the murder of Eldon Stammets. I have a second judge-issued warrant to search your entire property, including your home and any other buildings on it."

Will's vision blurred and he could hear Jack from the other day over the phone.

"Did I let a killer onto my team?"

Will was shaking his head, no, no. He felt weak, could smell gasoline, and everything went black.

Bfore Jack could even finish what he had to say Will was dropping like a sack of potatoes, immediately obscured by the pack of dogs. Jack called out for someone to get a medic and opened the screen door to push the dogs away so he could assess Will. His eyelids were fluttering and he had a fresh sheen of sweat on his brow. He was shaking like a leaf.

"Will," Jack tried, hearing his team at his back scrambling to figure out what was going on. "Will, can you hear me?"

Will wasn't concious, was having some sort of seizure. Jack ran a hand down his face and prayed for the first time in ten years. Over the next fifteen minutes they managed to get all of the dogs out of the house and move Will to a safer position in anticipation of the ambulance. When they were finally ushered out of the way by the EMTs Beverly came to Jack's side and looked him over.

"What happened?" she finally asked.

"He just fell," Jack replied, still shocked, hands wringing.

"Yeah, I saw that," Beverly said flatly. "I meant, how did we get here?"

"That's what we're trying to find out," Jack said, turning to speak to the whole group. "Let's focus, people! Find me some evidence, then we'll talk about the road to hell."

Beverly nodded grimly and went back to the team to go over their plan of entry and slip on a fresh pair of gloves. It was going to be a long day. She allowed herself one last look at Will's unmoving body before they closed up the back of the ambulance and drove off, siren starting up and cutting through the morning air.

Wild

Chapter Summary

Hannibal speaks to his therapist and decides to check on Will at the hospital.

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes

Hannibal woke early on the first day of the year. He opened the music app on his phone and selected a playlist of Vincent d'Indy's orchestral works performed by the Iceland Symphony Orchestra, turning the volume up loud enough to block out his thoughts, and ran on his home treadmill for an hour before anything else. He was showered and dressed, and doing a deep clean on the kitchen when his phone pinged around seven thirty. Jack let him know via text that Will had an incident while they were serving a warrant and was being transported to the hospital. It took every bit of self control to not immediately run to Will's side.

Instead, he thanked Jack for the update and made a last minute appointment with Bedelia. He had whole oats and an apple and allowed himself five minutes rest while he drank his coffee before getting back to cleaning.

His anger at Will's actions, at the *incident,* had hollowed him out, leaving behind a numbness that he wasn't sure what to do with. What really stuck with him was the fact that Will had looked at him with undisguised fear. The look of fear in someone's eyes was usually something he relished. It meant that he had hidden himself perfectly before that point, it meant he was about to end them. He didn't feel powerful in the wake of Will's fear, he felt resentful.

He hadn't even been trying to scare Will, he'd just wanted him to stay with him a while longer, to feel out the edges of his newfound understanding. Didn't he deserve that? Wasn't it natural to look into the face of your lover, your sudden rival, for recognition? Was understanding really too much to ask?

The answer, as it always had been, was yes. No matter how much he wanted Will's understanding, no matter how much Will had acted as if he was the only one who could truly hold the weight of what Hannibal was, he had broken under it all. And now he was breaking further, by Hannibal's actions. There was a gnawing impulse to burn it all to the ground and deny that there was any shock or sadness over Will's inability to accept him. He could feel his love for Will like a split lip, pulling painfully at any slight movement, refusing to be silent.

He wondered if there was a similar ache in Will, if they were still connected by some string of fate, invisible to the eye but pulling at them all the same.

Bedelia was stoking the fire in her home office when she heard Hannibal's Bently pull up the drive. He had sounded odd over the phone and she was reminded that even as she had trouble trusting Hannibal, she liked him. It had been a while since she'd been confronted with that bit of knowledge and she tried to remind herself not to fall too quickly for whatever pivot he might be planning.

A pivot was inevitable after what had happened at the opera. She didn't know what their little tiff had been about, but she knew that no one walked away from Hannibal unscathed and that twitchy little man had run off like he was being flayed alive.

"Good morning," she said as she opened her door, stepping aside to let Hannibal walk past her and hang up his coat.

He looked drawn in a way she hadn't seen him before, his eyes haunted and mouth tight. It was worse than she had thought, she realized, and that meant someone might wind up dead.

"It is morning," Hannibal allowed. "I'm not sure I should be making any value judgments in my state."

Bedelia walked with him to his seat and hovered near his elbow. "Can I get you some coffee?"

Hannibal nodded and she went to the far edge of the room to pour them both a fresh cup. It was a better option than wine at that hour and she wanted Hannibal to remain as unfiltered as he appeared. Sometimes, when a highly-guarded person was in pain, you could see things that they usually kept hidden. She returned with the coffee and handed a mug to Hannibal before sitting across from him.

"Can you tell me what happened?" she asked, aware that there were so many aspects of Hannibal's life that he couldn't tell anyone.

He slumped in his seat, a wave of agitation rushing over him. He was fighting an internal battle, and she watched him steady himself to speak.

"Will has gotten himself into trouble," he said at last. "He was taken into custody this morning, on suspicion of murder."

Bedelia's stomach dropped. *Suspicion of murder.* A year prior she had taken a patient from Hannibal, a patient that was concerned Hannibal was making him worse. The official report said that he choked to death on his tongue while trying to attack her, but the real story was muddier than that. The patient was primed for reaction, pushed to his limits by whatever Hannibal had done to him, and then pointed in her direction. He hadn't attacked her so much as threatened to go public with his complaints before starting to choke.

She blinked and she was back in that room, the patient gasping and grabbing his throat, his eyes going wide when he couldn't take in more air. She'd tried to stop it, and she had; her fist slipped down his throat as he scratched at her arms and his eyes rolled back. He shook violently for a while and then went limp. It wasn't the first time she'd witnessed someone die,

but the first where she was more than a witness. She wondered what Hannibal had pushed Will to do.

“You care about him,” she said carefully. “It must be hard for you. Did this have anything to do with him leaving the opera early?”

Anger flitted across Hannibal’s face and he took a long sip of his coffee. She watched as he pushed it down in favor of unsteady indifference.

“I’m glad Will has gone,” he said, eyes once again dark with a mix of melancholy and anger. “He was very hurtful to me when I saw him last. He was wild.”

Wild, Bedelia thought, *is what you drive us.*

“He’s not gone, Hannibal, he’s in custody,” she said calmly. “I can see you trying to run away from grief. No matter how quickly you run, it will catch up to you. I would encourage you to feel what you are feeling, as we all must.”

He looked disgusted for a moment and then tears welled up in his eyes, his mouth working as he breathed roughly through his nose.

“You care for him,” she added. “Your pain is real, Hannibal.”

“Pain he caused me,” Hannibal all but spat, face turning away as tears started to fall.

“Being vulnerable can be painful,” Bedelia agreed. “Especially for someone so perfectly contained. Is it possible that it hurts so much because you showed him parts of yourself you are usually able to control?”

“My control is unmatched,” Hannibal replied, holding his chin up defiantly.

Bedelia had two choices. She could allow Hannibal to write off what was surely a formative situation as below him, or she could push him a little further and see if the truth would spill out.

“In love,” she said, passing Hannibal a tissue box, “we are unburdened of our control. We allow another to shape us in ways we might not have thought possible. When perfection is given up for honesty, when we show others the parts of ourselves that we might wish to reject, we can grow as people. Growth, like any form of change, can be painful.”

“I showed him everything,” Hannibal agreed, nostrils flaring. “All of me.”

And there was the real issue; rejection. Will had rejected Hannibal, and the poor man was trying to stop the bleeding. He had a tourniquet around his heart, and for the first time she could see flashes of humanity beneath his cold exterior.

“I can imagine how difficult that was for you,” she assured him. “I know how closely you guard your secrets.”

Hannibal nodded once, dabbing at his tears, and she wondered at the fallout that might come from this sudden rift. Perhaps Will was already feeling it, in some holding cell somewhere.

Will came to in shifts, the world around him growing more vibrant, more in focus as a battery of tests was run on him to find the root of his infection. He felt the shakes of the MRI as though he was riding a roller coaster up and up, each tick getting him close to some unknown drop. By the time he was out of it and getting more fluids he could see as well as hear.

"I'll be back in ten minutes to change this out," a nurse said, directing her comment to someone just out of view behind a tower of beeping medical equipment.

Will let his eyes blink a few more times before he tried to turn his head, anticipating pain. He was having trouble remembering how he got to the hospital, but the second he saw Hannibal sitting in the plastic chair in the corner he was jolted back to reality. That was when he felt the handcuffs, his movement restricted completely.

"Water," he said, voice dry from disuse.

Hannibal jumped into action, holding a plastic cup up and directing the straw to Will's lips. Will drank down half the cup before turning his head and spitting a good mouthful back at Hannibal's face like an angry camel. He collapsed back against the pillow, a pained grunt falling from his lips as Hannibal dealt with a bit of surprise and disappointment.

"I see your attitude hasn't changed for the better," Hannibal said, pulling his chair a bit out of what he obviously considered spitting distance.

"Perhaps it's, ah, tied to my circumstances," Will ground out, trying to find a comfortable position.

"You are sick, Will," Hannibal replied. "Forgive me for thinking you would like to see a friendly face."

Will was shocked, as he always was, at how easily Hannibal could push his buttons and get a response. Even half-conscious he was picking apart the man's sentences.

"You aren't my friend, Doctor Lecter," he said, leaning on the 'd' in doctor a bit hard. "You're my tormenter, and this is Hell."

Will missed any reaction from Hannibal, as his head was pounding again and he had to close his eyes, but he counted the brief pause in his favor.

"You have an opportunity to get treatment," Hannibal insisted. "Perhaps when you are healthy again you'll be able to understand my actions."

Will sighed and turned his head away. "Oh, I understand you," he said, voice weak. "Understanding has never been the problem."

There was a good amount of silence and Will almost gave in to the exhaustion, sleep calling to him. Hannibal's voice, when it did come, was low enough for the officer at the door to

miss, and he was close enough for Will to feel the heat of him.

"I haven't given up on the idea that we'll be together again soon," Hannibal murmured.

"Hey?" Will asked, voice soft to catch his attention. Hannibal nodded at the pause, lips parting, and Will went on. "Go fuck yourself."

Hannibal closed his mouth and let his eyes roam over Will's body for a silent moment. Finally, he nodded once and left the room, Will watching his back as he disappeared down the hall. Will let his eyes close, let sleep take him.

Chapter End Notes

Hannibal, trying to be covert, trying for romance: I haven't given up you. On us.

Will, looking him in the eye: fuck you fuck you fuck you fuck you

Guilt

Chapter Summary

The team at the BAU talks over what the evidence shows them and Will receives a visitor that he doesn't want to turn away.

The quartet seemed evenly split on whether their coworker was a killer, with Beverly and Jimmy Price insisting on his innocence and Zeller siding with Jack that the evidence made him look guilty. They stood in the cold lights of the underground Quantico lab, hunched over a familiar stainless steel table, looking at stacks of reports and other evidence.

“We already know the Ripper was watching Will, that he was obsessed with him, why is it such a stretch to believe it turned bad and he’s framing Will?” Beverly asked, picking up the bag full of shell casings recovered from the clearing next to Will’s house.

“You could watch him kill a man and still defend him,” Zeller replied, almost under his breath.

“Do I need to remind you,” Jack started, voice serious, “that this isn’t a popularity contest? A man is dead, and on our colleague’s property we find the man’s car, his phone, his rifle, and his handgun.”

“And some human meat,” Jimmy added, holding his hand aloft like a child asking a teacher if he could use the bathroom.

“Human meat,” Zeller echoed, throwing his hands up in agitation and turning away from the group to sulk in the corner.

“So now Will is what? Eating people?” Beverly asked.

“My greatest fear is that we’ll find out he’s been playing us all along,” Jack said, his eyes looking glazed as he let his imagination run wild. “What better disguise for a calculating psychopath than a man with extreme empathy? What if he can understand the inner lives of the killers we catch *because* he’s one of them?”

“Somebody is eating people,” Jimmy replied. “But I don’t think it’s Will. He’s not cannibalism weird, he’s kicked puppy weird.”

“Wouldn't a more practiced killer want to take a kicked puppy under their wing?” Jack asked. “We know that Stammets was the one that made contact, so that makes two killers interested in Will. What about him is so entrancing, if not his ability to empathize with the killers?”

“You sound like Freddy Lounds,” Beverly interrupted. “Can we actually stick to what we know? Stammets intended to make contact with Will, everything he had with him when he did that remained on the property. Most likely he was killed there.”

“There was no residual!” Jimmy interrupted. “The floor of the boat house is dirt, there’s no way he was killed there without leaving a trace. The kitchen was clean of contaminants, clean of bleach. Even the bullet casings are clean. If he died on the property, where is the blood, the viscera?”

“We have to put this into a timeline, that’s the only way to understand it. Stammets' phone goes dark midday, then Will’s phone goes dark, and he shows up at Hannibal’s office,” Jack explained. “I want to know where he was that night, where he was when the body was displayed. Do we really still not have info on how a whole tree was placed across the street from us?”

“CCTV was disabled. Silly string on all the appropriate cameras,” Zeller answered, coming back to the group with a look of total defeat. “All cameras coming and going were out for the whole night.”

“There’s so much planning,” Beverly said. “And Hannibal wants us to believe Will was disabled by this illness at the time?”

Jack thought about that for a moment,taking in the info and adjusting accordingly. “He kills Stammets, maybe while blacked out, wakes up and turns to the only person he knows who can dispose of a body, the Ripper?”

“Then why leave the car and the guns on the property? Are we saying Will is a calculated criminal, or someone who leaves evidence all over his own house?” Beverly asked. “He didn’t get rid of the evidence when we were all being questioned? When we were finding out he was the love interest? That’s way too sloppy.”

Jimmy had been quiet for a while, but he seemed to think of something and leaned in, eyes on the table. “Do we even know if Will can stand trial? They’ve got him on antivirals and steroid therapy but encephalitis is hard to treat, and can leave lasting damage. If he never remembers that day…”

The room fell into silence, the only sound made by Beverly's laptop whirring away in the corner.

Alana was sitting in the plastic chair next to Will’s hospital bed when he woke up next. He'd exhausted himself interacting with Hannibal, and had slept a good two hours since he’d left. Every conversation that took place between them at that point was so stuffed full of innuendo to not register as the English language, and Will wondered if they would ever be on the same page again.

Alana, though, could possibly still see Will for what he was. He blinked his eyes a few times and smiled weakly at her, trying his best not to look like a criminal.

“You’re awake,” she said, glancing up to the door where an officer stood.

“Unfortunately,” he replied. “Not that it isn’t good to see your face.”

“Oh, Will,” she said, struggling to contain her emotions. Will’s hand lifted up instinctively to soothe her, and the rattle of the handcuffs made everything worse.

“I’m okay,” he insisted, trying for another weak smile. It felt like if he could convince her, he might be able to convince himself. “I’m okay.”

“You’re not, though. You haven’t been okay for a while,” she replied, reaching out to gently squeeze his forearm. “But you’re gonna be. Have the doctor’s explained to you what they think is going on?”

Will nodded. “Yeah, yeah. Basically my brain is on fire. Which accounts for the lost time, the sleepwalking, for all my headaches and the fever. The antibiotics I was taking couldn't have handled it, even if I’d been good at taking them.”

“And has Jack explained to you what the charges are?” She asked, just as gently.

A moment passed between them, the beep of the heart rate monitor obnoxiously loud. The fact that this was going to be the only thing people wanted to ask him about for the foreseeable future gave him the most unnerving sense of dejá vu. His life was now stuck in orbit around the question of his guilt.

“They think I killed Stammets,” Will said, wondering in what capacity she was there. “Are you asking for Jack?”

“And myself,” she said. The admission that she wasn't there on an entirely friendly basis made Will adjust his approach slightly.

“I don’t think I killed Stammets,” he said, focusing his eyes just over Alana's shoulder to give himself a little relief. “Something happened, I lost time, I ended up at Hannibal's office. I wasn't covered in blood, there weren't any defensive wounds. The only thing that stood out was an injection site.”

“That’s less reassurance than I was hoping for, if I’m honest,” Alana admitted.

Will felt that old pit inside him open up and he was back to wanting to disappear.

“I can reassure you that I didn’t mutilate the body, and I didn’t eat him,” he said, eyes going distant on the last few words.

Jesus, had he eaten Stammets? Had Hannibal served him to the group of them at his dinner party while they talked about the display? He remembered mushroom risotto, a wooden spoon at his lips.

“Do you know who did?” Alana asked, searching his face.

“I think that’s plea bargain territory, Doctor Bloom,” Will replied darkly, seeing how this could easily turn into an interrogation.

“You’re right,” she agreed. “I’m sorry. I really just came to tell you I have the dogs. They’re doing fine, getting used to my house. Winston is restless, but he’ll settle in. They can stay with me until this is all over.”

Will felt a monstrous grief well up in him and nodded at her, thankful that someone who cared about his dogs had them. His throat was tight with it and he just wanted to go home.

“Thank you,” he choked out.

“Rest now, and I’ll go,” she replied, standing and gathering her coat from the seat next to her. “You still have to recover.”

“Alana,” he said, just as she was leaving. “Can you block Hannibal from visiting me? Can we just take him off the list or something?”

Alana’s eyebrows drew together but she nodded. “Yeah, of course, Will. I’ll let the nurse at the front desk know.”

“Thank you,” Will replied, resting back in bed and closing his eyes.

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